

# *Once Upon A Lifetime*

*in and near Baker County, Florida*



*By La Vice Moore-Fraser Smallwood*  
*Volume 1*

COVER PHOTOS -

Clockwise from top:

First 3 persons from left to right unknown. Brantley Fraser, Mother Rosanna "Rosa" Roberts Fraser Holding Daughter Maude, Harold Fraser with father Thomas Brantley Fraser: Sanderson.

Thomas B. Fraser, wife Rosa (Roberts) with three of their nine children Harold, Brantly, Maude.

Lewis Roberts, Abe Canova, Calvin Green, T.B. Fraser (last person unknown): Sanderson.

Brantly Harrison Fraser, wife Maranda Bowyer Fraser: Sanderson.

Original homeplace of Lucious and Erie (Fish) Combs

*Once Upon A Lifetime*  
*in and near Baker County, Florida*



**Brantly Harrison and Maranda (Bowyer) Fraser with son Clem.  
Sanderson early 1900s.**

FIRST EDITION

BY

**La Viece (Moore-Fraser) Smallwood**

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1993

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## FORWARD

I remember the first time I met La Viece Smallwood. She came to my office in the Florida Times-Union's weekend department to ask about writing a weekly column on genealogy. Great idea, I thought. There is an abiding interest in nostalgia and family history, especially in the hinterlands where we wanted to reach more readers. We soon started the "Out on a Limb" feature which continues today to be a popular T-U fixture.

Typical of her modesty and gentility, La Viece always approached with a half-apologetic, "I'm not bothering you at a bad time, am I?" Bothering? Bad time? In her stories there are only good times; the good old days that the folks lived back when. Her stories are like soul music and country cooking all rolled into one.

Not being a professional journalist, she at first lacked confidence in her writing. As she says, "I write like I talk." Newspaper writers are trained to stack one fact or assertion on another, preceded by the who-what-where-when-and- sometimes-why recipe. Not always tasty. La Viece's stories and columns don't fit that formula, of course, and that's good. In writing like she talks, she takes us down home where the hearts of many are. Always tasty. Like blackeyes, turnip greens, grits and cornbread. Her enthusiasm for gathering raw material for the stories, and for life in general, seems boundless. I'm proud to have had a hand in helping to spread her words.

Elvin Henson February 15, 1993

Former Managing Editor of Jacksonville Journal

Managing Editor of Week-end edition Florida Times Union and  
Jacksonville Journal, Retired



# DEDICATION

LEST I FORGET

This volume is humbly dedicated in honor of



## MY BELOVED GRANDPARENTS

**Thomas Brantly Fraser and Rosanna LeNora (Roberts) Fraser**

16 Sept. 1883-20 Sept. 1974      17 April 1887-10 Apr. 1960

For their sustaining love, support and faith in me.



## MY FATHER

**CARL BENJAMIN MOORE**

21 Jan. 1900- 23 Nov 1969

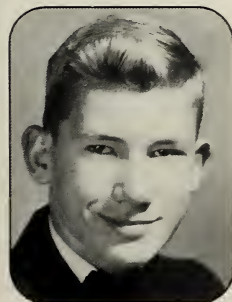
Whose steadfast devotion and sacrifices for me  
and my family will forever be indelibly  
imprinted upon my heart.

## MY MOTHER

**BLANCHE ELIZABETH (FRASER-MOORE) SMOAK**

17 April 1911—

who gave me birth and a family legacy for  
which I'm indebted.



## MY BROTHER

**WILLIAM THOMAS 'BILLY' MOORE**

23 Jan. 1937-1 Jan. 1958

whose understanding and enduring love are an  
eternal flame of influence in my life.

....and also to  
my husband

**Zackary Vincent Smallwood, Sr.**

and my children

**Zackary V. "Zac" Smallwood, Jr.**

**Tamara Sue Smallwood Ellison**

**Teri Elizabeth Smallwood Looper**

and their children

**Tabitha, Zackary III, Shannon, Jeffrey, Ashlynn Smallwood**

**Ryan, Bree and Taylor Ellison**

**Kayla and Rand Looper**

.....Because I love you

Last, but in no way least to  
my beloved and appreciated brother and sister-in-law

**Emmett and Wilma (Smallwood) Gallagher**

for your unconditional love and confidence



# Grandpa

(1883-1974)



Grandpa, I said, as I sat at his knee,  
Tell me some stories that used to  
be.

Well, he said honey, there once was  
a man,

Who lived over yonder and settled this land  
He built him a cabin from fine virgin wood-  
And built him some furnishings as best he could  
He raised him a family – a fine brood of nine –  
And all of his young'ens suited him fine  
He plowed the fields and planted the crops  
You'd think them poor,  
But they really had lots.

I remember the time a baby was born,  
They made all of its clothes  
From some that were worn.

They got up at daybreak and worked until night-  
Using wax candles if they needed a light  
They made their own butter with milk from the cow  
Ate food from the garden they made with a plow  
And the clothes they wore proudly on their back  
Were made with material from the old flour sack  
On Sunday they rested from all of their labors  
And met at the church with friends and neighbors.

Sometimes they had dinner, what they called 'on the ground'-  
And no better food in this world could be found  
The love of this family could never be told  
For it was more priceless than silver or gold.

I saw a tear trickle down grandpa's face-  
And a smile on his lips that seemed frozen in place  
I jumped from his lap-and patted his hand  
For I knew my grandpa had been this great man!

**La Viece (Moore-Fraser) Smallwood**



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DEAR READER

For more than 40 years I have been writing about people. Many of them have been my favorite, those who share deep roots in the soil of my forefathers.

Most people take decades to assemble and publish a book. In my case many of the stories had already appeared in print through newspaper feature stories. Some of the material I collected had been edited for space and it was one of my editors at the Florida Times-Union who encouraged me to keep my original material and someday write a book, revising the stories and publishing them in their fullness. Although I planned for several years to do this, it seemed something always interfered. In January of 1993, I made the decision to began work on the book: compiling, revising, making additions and adding updates. As the material multiplied, I decided to began a series of volumes until I could collect as many interviews with people as possible. The life each has lived is important to me, and I hope it will be to you too.

There is a certain amount of emotion that can't be described when you enter someone's private life. Some of the sketches in this book will go back for more than three decades, long before I learned that there was a technique to interviewing, long before I learned one should be schooled and learned and trained before entering into this type of work. It was a blessing for me that I didn't know because I may not have had the courage to begin.

This work has been a labor of love for me and a blessing. I will certainly take all responsibility if there are errors or omissions...and there will be. I have relied on inspiration to capture in part a microscopic glimpse into the lives of these very special people. It has been my desire to secure for their posterity an impression of their riveting personality. In all cases, the interviewees have been allowed to read the story before publication to assure accuracy and also to provide me the assurance that the narrative has been told in a manner acceptable to them.

I am indebted to those of you who have allowed me the privilege of visiting in your homes, who have talked forthright about

your own life without the least bit of inhibition. Many of you have said to me, "I don't know why anyone would want to know my story, I've never done anything important," and all the while you have been molding lives, being a good neighbor, working hard to make an honest living and making do with what you had in an era long before most of us were born. You have feared God enough to live honest, upright, just lives and have left a proud legacy for your posterity. And even those of you who have told me about past transgressions have shown great humility. Mistakes are something all of us make, and I have understood how you feel about them, especially when there is a story of your life being written. In some instances I have recorded them with your approval, yet in some cases certain events in your lives have been left unsaid because they were not the real issue. My greatest desire is that your life, in part or whole, will not be forgotten. Too many of our Baker County forefathers have passed into oblivion and lay in unmarked graves, records and incidents in their lives lost forever because no record of any type has been preserved.

I feel very strongly that this work, and all other like it, has a purpose because.....

In the last chapter of Malachi, the final Old Testament prophecy is recorded in verses five and six. It is my firm and honest belief that these stories will share in this prophecy, and I feel humble indeed that I have had the privilege and joy of being a part of my Heavenly Father's work....for He said:

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:

And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

I am truly very grateful to each of you for sharing a small glimpse into your life with me, and others, for now we can know just how it was, ONCE UPON A LIFETIME IN BAKER COUNTY FLORIDA.

With sincere appreciation,  
La Viece





**La Viece Smallwood**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Many people have asked me how I became interested in writing, especially as it developed into so many varied phases: diaries, journals, poetry, songs, letters, short stories, features, interviews and on and on. So this is that story because I owe a debt of gratitude and acknowledgement to many people who have paved the way for me to do the work I have always loved and had an avid interest in.

Through my paternal lineage there has been a succession of writers, some famous and some, like me, who write for the enjoyment and fulfillment it brings. To those who came before me I owe much for my endowment.

Edgar Lee Masters, a great American writer, and I share a great grandfather, Notley Masters. It has been said by many that his literary offerings changed the course of American literature. He is best known among his countless contributions for his Spoon River Anthology, and he has written verses, songs and satires. World Book encyclopedia says "his writing style is that of his own instead of regular form. His works reflect that of his life and his portrayal of characters is remarkable."

I regret to say I've never read his many contributions although I have an autographed copy of "Across Spoon River" about our Masters family.....a gift from his son Hilary, also a writer. Colleagues and educators have told me that we possess the same style and characterization of writing skills, and for those observations I am humbled. My narratives, in whatever form, are not written with any thought of achieving literary distinction. Far from it. It is merely an effort to leave in some form of preservation things of a much simpler and less-hurried, less-harried age; things we may be too busy to sit and listen to now yet will want to know in later years. In tracing the Masters family tree, I have interviewed many members of this family who possess writing skills and are adept at writing family sketches just as Edgar did, though they are not as famous. Like me, they are amateurs who do it for the love and enjoyment of it. Before my Uncle Homer Moore died, he wrote me long descriptive discourses on members of our family that he knew personally, but who died long before I was born. His sister, my Aunt Ruth Campbell, wrote a book, like Edgar, on the family, for the love and fun of it. My favorite letters are shared with Aunt Ruth's granddaughter, Suzanne Banks Potts, who lives in Atlanta. Her lively descriptions of people, places and things are more vividly portrayed than any famous author I have read. Therefore, I firmly believe that my Father in Heaven has given this particular family talents with a mission. I'm very proud to say too, that all three of my children keep journals and family records, all three write poetry and interesting descriptive letters. My daughter Teri is editor of her company's newsletter. When Teri's daughter, Kayla, was only two she discovered my pictorial journal on the dining table, grabbed a pen, and quickly made her writing debut directly on top of what I had written and illustrated with photos. I was too thrilled to think she might be the next family scribe to get upset with her. And how thrilled I was when my 11-year-old granddaughter Tabitha requested a diary for Christmas last year and my 10-year-old grandson Ryan asked for a journal. Of course I honored their request. So I am very grateful for my heritage.

Had it not been for my mother moving to North Carolina when I was 12, I might never have thought about writing professionally. It was there, in Wilmington, that I lived across the street

from a girl, my age, who wrote a column about teenagers for the local paper. When I returned to Macclenny in 1950 and entered the sophomore class, I approached Mr. Tate Powell Sr. and his son, Tate Jr. about doing a column called "High School Highlights." They gave me my first job...without pay of course. It was so much fun that I extended it into the summer months as "Teen Times." When I graduated from Macclenny-Glen High School, Tate Jr. offered to send me to college to pursue writing, but I was not in a position to consider his offer. A few years later, after I began my marriage and children, I wrote a column for him called "News and Views" that contained the comings and goings of Baker Countians and the local social activities. Sometimes I added a "Citizen of the Week" to my column, highlighting (usually older) citizens. I worked free but when my family began to grow, and I had no money for babysitters, I reluctantly gave it up. Mr. Powell called me up and said he had people "storming my door in protest that your writing has ceased" so he offered me \$10 a month to continue. That was a lot of money in 1957. It was enough to pay someone \$1.25 for a whole afternoon to sit with my napping children and clean my house while I went out getting news and doing interviews.

But that all ended when we moved away from Baker County and I chose to devote the next two decades to being a homemaker and writing for personal enjoyment.

In the late 1970s, I became a close friend of Nancy Weir, food editor for The Florida Times-Union. Nancy read a story I wrote on Emily (Davis) (Mrs. Clede) Harvey from Baker County. She shared the story with Doreen Sharkey, her editor in Lifestyle, who in turn obtained permission from me to publish it in the cooking section of a Thursday's edition of The Florida Times-Union.

The story received an immediate response from the public who requested the paper print more such stories. Doreen asked me to become the Country Cooking feature writer for the Lifestyle section. Many of the stories I wrote were about Baker Countians.

To Nancy and Doreen I owe a debt of gratitude. And for our continuing friendship I am grateful.

In addition to the Country Cooking features, Nancy had paved the way for me to meet the Weekend Editor, Elvin Henson, about writing a column on genealogy. At first he was reluctant to



hire someone inexperienced in journalism, but after the story on Emily Harvey appeared he gave me the chance to write for him. For his confidence in giving me an opportunity to become a regular columnist for The Florida Times-Union I shall forever be thankful. The chance has given me an enormous amount of opportunities and wonderful experiences through the years. Though he has retired, we keep in touch and share a friendship that I treasure. In addition, Mr. Henson published multitudinous of my weekend feature stories, on the front page and in color. I wrote about people from all walks of life.....and found the experience exhilarating.

I had the same experience writing for the Times-Union Features Department. It was Features Editor, Ripley Hotch, who first mentioned that I should consider publishing my stories in a book. He told me that the portions of my features being edited for space were too good to be lost. He encouraged me to keep my hard copy and consider publishing them complete with all the information I had gathered.

And had it not been for the opportunity Lifestyle Editor, Norm Going, gave me to interview Loretta Lynn, I might have never gained the confidence to interview and write about other celebrities like Alex Haley, Donna Fargo, Conway Twitty and Pat Summerall. For Norm's confidence, I am indeed indebted.

Over the years, there have been many people at the Florida Times-Union who have become good friends and always given me support and encouragement. I want to especially thank Editor Frederick W. Hartmann, for permission to use portions of the work I've done for the paper, including liberty to use the photographs illustrating the features. To Jody Kestler in the photography department for pulling all the back-dated photos for me I am grateful.

To Frank Smith and Ray Stafford, two Times-Union photographers, who usually accompanied me on story assignments, I want to say, "thank you" for the times you allowed me to "have my way" and direct your photography skills. I'm glad we remain good friends, and still continue to enjoy our long association.

Jeff Moriarty, a new friend, who is the executive editor of The Baker County Standard, has edited this book. He is a whiz kid and has almost singlehandedly put together a new weekly newspaper in my community. To Jeff, I am more than grateful for just



editing this book. He works with me to keep Baker County a living history and although he is relatively new here (six months) I am deeply appreciative for the genuine concern and interest he shows for Baker County and her people. He fits into the community like an old, comfortable slipper.

And even with all the above, this book and any others that follow, may not have been possible without the love and devotion, patience and caring shown by my son Zac. When I first began writing for the Times-Union, I used an old, very old, manual typewriter. Zac encouraged me to get an electric typewriter, but I was afraid of power failure and not meeting a deadline. So he just walked in one day with a top-of-the-line Olivetti and said, "just try it Mom." I kept it, and couldn't imagine life without it, but I also kept that old manual "just in case." Then the computer age dawned, and Zac was telling me I needed a computer. Once again I wouldn't hear of something that "might break down" and leave me stranded. Two years ago when I received one for Christmas, I knew it was Zac who had put it on Santa's list. Today I can't even imagine this book, or any other thing I write, going to print without it. Zac has furnished me software and any assistance I may need on the computer, but it is for his patience and empathy (my computer and I have a very long way to go before we understand each other), and support that I am most grateful.

The One I shall give the most credit is my Heavenly Father. He has provided me with all these good friends, opportunities and guidance, for which I am void of expression when it comes to verbalizing my deep and heartfelt gratitude to Him. It is to Him that I give all the honor, and credit that may ever come for this work.

La Viece (Moore-Fraser) Smallwood, 1993



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## **Ernest Harvey, Jr. 1993**

*"You might just say my father traded me to someone for a pint of moonshine."*

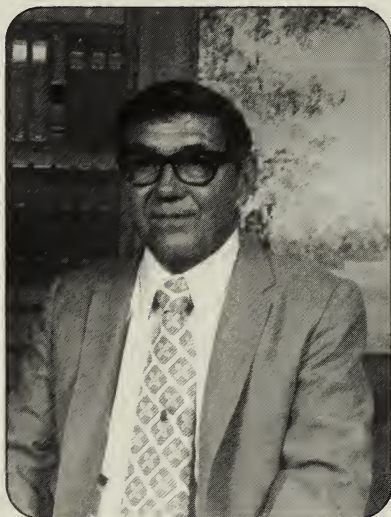
When Ernest Harvey, Jr. was born August 15, 1923, in Seven Mile Camp in Columbia County, it was in the most humble of circumstances, yet his father, Ernest Senior, an employee of the East Coast Lumber Company made good money for the times. The family of eight was painfully poor. When Ernest Sr. got paid on Friday, he drank moonshine until his salary was gone, and then he went home empty-handed to his family.

"Our bellies were always hungry", expressed Ernest, who climbed the mountain of success yet has remained modest like his beginnings. The children learned to survive on palmetto roots and berries from the woods when they grew hungry. In spite of the difficult times, Ernest said with undaunted conviction "I loved my parents, they were good people."

Ernest's parents were members of colossal pioneering families in Baker County. His paternal grandfather, Andrew Harvey, was a tax assessor of Baker County and fathered 19 children. (An uncle, Roy Harvey) served as a Baker County Commissioner for 28 and a half years.

His story is a saga, following one dramatic situation after another. The fact that he survived is astonishing. And the certainty of his accomplishments under the most difficult obstacles is nothing short of miraculous.

Ernest began his life in a small, crude two-room section home available to employees of the East Coast Lumber Company.



**Ernest Harvey, Jr.**

"It was so small that when the company relocated, a crane just picked up the house with the family in it, placed us on a flat bed train car and settled us on the next site," he recalled. "I remember those days with great excitement," he said, remembering how he and the other boys would jump from car to car as the train rumbled down the steel tracks. "And I was just a little squirt of a fellow."

When East Coast Lumber Company went bankrupt, Ernest Sr. took a job share-cropping for a large landowner, T.J. Knabb. But he was a restless man and moved from place to place regularly.

"If we acquired anything, we'd just sell it and move on," explained Ernest. He remembered too that his father was a man of drastic temperament. Often he would destroy the family's furniture and belongings in rages of temper.

"If mother got any money on pay day she'd cook a big meal and we seven children would eat until we got the belly-ache," mused Ernest. "We knew we'd starve the rest of the week. When daddy did bring home a pay-check the family would gladly walk the five miles to Lake City to buy groceries and tote them home."

Ernest Sr. was cutting railroad cross-ties for a living and drinking up his pay in whiskey when his wife, Sarah (Davis), died on January 19, 1935. She was buried on January 21, her 38th birthday.

Up to this time, Ernest's brothers Paul and J.D. had helped their father cut cross ties, their hard labor uncompensated.

"I don't know how our family would have made it without their help," said Ernest. Their sacrifice had seen the family through meager survival. With the mother now gone, Ernest's sister, Roxie, left to find work in Jacksonville, Beatrice married, and Paul struck out on his own, enlisting in the CCCs. Sister Gladys had previously gone to live with her paternal grandmother and had never returned to the family. J.D., Beatrice, baby Helen and 11-year-old Ernest were left at home with their alcoholic father. (A child named Ralph had died earlier.)

"Coping with everything was hard on daddy," said Ernest. "He gave J.D. up for adoption to a man named Owen Cobb, but J.D. ran away to Grandma the next day, and for a while just lived from place to place mostly with relatives." In the fall of that year, little Helen contracted polio and was placed in Hope Haven hospital in Jacksonville.

Until this time, Ernest said his life wasn't too much different than many of those he knew. But all that changed on a cool crisp November morning when Ernest Sr. came to the Sanderson school house and summoned his son out of his fourth grade class. With him was German Crews, a local bootlegger. To satisfy a whiskey debt, Ernest Sr. gave his son up for adoption.

"You might just say my father traded me to someone for a pint of moonshine," said the mild-mannered Ernest. "And believe it or not, I had mixed emotions about it. After all, German Crews had a store in Margaretta and food on his table so I thought I'd be better off. I never blamed my father for what happened to me." The adoption had cost German Crews and his wife Evelyn \$30. Ernest was transferred to school in Glen St. Mary where his teacher was Baker County native Arlie Rewis.

Life was to be better, and it was for three months. As quickly as it began it was over. Crews had purchased a 20 acre farm four miles from his business. Ernest was taken to the farm and introduced to his new home and surroundings. As German Crews drove away, he left a small parcel of food for Ernest and some musty stale corn for the hogs. It was to be the last food the 12-year-old would receive from his adoptive father in the almost three years he tilled the man's land.

Walking into the sparsely furnished rickety old farm shack, he noticed a large gaping hole where a fireplace should have been. Decrepit wooden shutters on the windows hung loosely and the cold November wind easily blew in. A lone slim cot could be seen in the dark corner of the room where he inspected a dingy mattress stuffed with Spanish moss filling and held together with feed sack ticking. A thin dank blanket lay across the cot, intended to be his cover against the winter chill. There was no pillow to lay his head. And his humble dwelling place had no back door, exposing him to intruders.

That night and many to follow were sleepless.

"Huge rats crawled on the rafters above me," remembered Ernest. "I couldn't help but wondered what would happen if one fell on me. And I almost froze to death. There was this cow that tried to push against the hole in the wall where feed sacks hung to cut the wind out and the noise she made would scare me throughout the night. The china berries that fell from the tree and hit the house's tin roof were just as frightening."



Within three days he had pneumonia. His chest pounded with pain. The winter wind raged and the cold air circulated throughout the house. Sick as he was, he took some lard, put it in a saucer, tied a rag around a chip of wood and made a light until it burned out. Needing to relieve himself, he managed to get to the edge of the porch. He remembers falling off. He could see beneath the house to the other side. Clearly visible, he said, were the strong legs of a bull and he was scared.

Speaking with conviction he continued, "I know I saw the bull, but suddenly he ran, and I saw a pair of human legs. That is the last I remember for awhile, but when I became conscious someone had put me on the porch. My head lay on a burlap bag that wasn't there before. The sun was coming up in the east and it warmed my body. I fell asleep and when I awoke again the sun was settling down in the west. I was able to get up and hand grind some corn and cook some grits on the wood burning stove. I ate heartily. From that day on I was never scared again. I never felt alone again. After that experience, I'd lie in bed at night, and the rats roaming the ceiling rafters even looked beautiful to me. The cows would be bellowing outside, and my body freezing cold, but I'd feel safe, as if someone was in the bed with me."

Then reflecting he said, "To this day I've never figured out who picked me up and put me on the porch, but I've always considered this to be the first memorable encounter I had with the Lord. And I can honestly say that I've never met a man I didn't like."

Six weeks later, German Crews visited the farm. This time he brought some chickens for Ernest to tend along with the cows and hogs. They were put in an existing coop. In a few days, Ernest discovered dead chickens "all over the place." Ernest ran the four miles to Margaretta to notify German Crews. The two drove in Crews's Model T Ford truck to the farm. Together they buried the dead chickens.

Then, to Ernest's horror, he was forced to lie on a large mound of dirt while Crews beat him with a heavy flat shovel. Crews, seriously into witchcraft, accused Ernest of casting a spell on his chickens so he wouldn't have to feed them.

"I don't know why he said that when the hogs and cows survived," he said as if still bothered by the fact he was so faultily accused. "But," he explained, "his wife was into voodoo too and even if

they got a headache, or stumped their toe I was accused of casting a spell or causing their problems. When they beat me they called themselves beating 'the spirits' out of me. I suppose that is how the saying 'beat the devil out of em' originated."

"Actually," Ernest explained, "the chickens had coccidiosis, an existing condition in the old coop".

The beating put Ernest in bed unable to move. In a few days, Crews's mother-in-law passed the farm and found the 60-pound, 12-year-old boy in a poor condition. She managed to load him onto her wagon pulled by a mule, and take him for medical help. A salve was prescribed and applied to his wounds, and for six weeks Ernest was unable to get out of bed. However, when he did, Crews returned him immediately to the farm where he lived a recluse life for the next two and a half years.

Once a week, Ernest regularly walked the four miles to Crew's store where he would spend the night and "tote" back two pails of slop for the hogs before daylight the following morning. Barefooted, the spindly, undernourished, youth made his way in the summer's heat or winter's cold. With no food, he quickly learned to fend for himself. He added salt to the hog's corn to keep the weevils out. He would use a hand grinder to make grits, and the salt off the corn husks to season his grits. He used a straight pin with an attached string to catch (mostly) catfish from the nearby Cedar Creek. He found berries and roots from the surrounding woods to eat. He drew water from a polluted muggy well that filled his bucket with wiggle tails from mosquito larvae. "I'd quickly hit the bucket and they'd go to the bottom so I could drink from the top," he said matter of factly as he explained his survival techniques.

Summer months meant fighting mosquitoes that swarmed into the windowless and doorless shack. He burned cow dung to smoke them out. To fight the "bed bugs" he put the four corners of his bed in saucers of kerosene. "If you didn't fight them, they'd suck all your blood out," he said. "Every night I'd try to pick the bugs off my moss mattress where they'd be visibly crawling all over. In the morning the bed would always be covered with my fresh blood where I'd rolled over and squashed them."

Equipped with a hoe, Ernest was expected to keep prickly briars from growing on the farm. "I had 20 acres to clear and those brier



bushes could grow as tall as ten feet high," he said. "I cleared land and planted corn and peanuts for the mass amount of hogs kept on the farm." And he did it alone. His father, siblings or relatives never visited as long as he was there. There was one person, however, who he says probably saved his life. She was a respected county midwife. "And I loved her as dear as I could love anyone," he said.

Walter and Mary Woolbright, a negro couple, happened to be Ernest's nearest neighbors. Often times Mary would send one of her grand children (usually 'Punk Blue") for Ernest and invite him to eat with them. He vividly remembers those special times. "Mary would have my own little table set up with a starched white cloth, and while she and her family ate at their dining table, I ate from my own table because I was white." In those days, he explained, that was proper among blacks and whites. "She was no doubt aware of my predicament and this was her way of helping me," he said, explaining that many times he'd also find fresh vegetables from the Woolbright's garden on his porch.

Two and a half years passed while the devil beatings and cruel punishments continued. Survival was a daily task, along with the long hard hours of work it required to run the 20 acre farm. Ernest finally decided to run away. In the small town of Sanderson, about six miles from the farm, Ernest took refuge for the night in a railroad boxcar. Much to his surprise, he was awakened by a tremendous bang and jolt and the boxcar moved along so fast Ernest ended up 30 miles east in Jacksonville before it stopped.

"I was in a city, and all alone," he said. "I just began to walk and ended up on a bench in Hemming Park. A one-legged man sat down by me on the bench and introduced himself. He invited me to come live with him and his wife on Church Street and I did. They were basically kind and honest people, but I decided to move on and went down to the railroad yard and jumped a freight train. I rode on that train and several other trains. I would get off in one town, steal something to eat, and move on. I was arrested in one small town. I was starving to death and hiding under a depot in a town in North Carolina when I apparently passed out," he said. "When I awoke I was in a hospital, the first one I'd ever seen. I had to tell them my name and where I was from, so they called German Crews to come for me."

German Crews arrived on a train to take his adopted boy back to Baker County, to Margareta, and to the farm.

The rain had poured down for a week when German Crews arrived one day at the farm and instructed Ernest to set tobacco plants out in the down pour. When Ernest protested, the unscrupulous Crews threatened to beat him with a rugged cow whip. Scared of the beating, Ernest grabbed a plow heel and hit his master over the head. He then quickly ran six miles to his Grandma's house, told her of his situation, and never returned to the Crews's farm. As far as he remembers, there was never an attempt to have him returned, or any mention of his attack on Crews.

About this time his little sister Helen was released from Hope Haven Hospital and returned to the care of Ernest Sr., living in Watertown (near Lake City), sawing logs for a living. Ernest, his brothers, Paul and J.D., moved there and lived in the meager facilities. "We boys slept on the hard floor while Helen (about 5 years old) slept on the bed with daddy," he said. "Helen couldn't walk so daddy and my older brothers worked while I stayed home to care for Helen, cook and tend house. Ernest taught Helen to walk again while he tended her.

"We soon moved back to Sanderson," said Ernest. "Helen went to live with a married sister and daddy and I lived with my Mama's sister for a few months until there was no work left, or food."

Homeless, Ernest roamed the woods and occasionally found shelter with friends or relatives. His desire for an education lingered and he began going to school, where he was placed in the seventh grade. He hollowed him a haven between two large palmettos near the Sanderson school house. When not in school, much of his time was spent reading a Sears Roebuck catalog he found in a privy, (of times called an outhouse or outdoor toilet). At night he crawled through a broken window pane in the boy's bathroom and slept on the first aid cot, leaving before the caretaker arrived and returning to his palmetto hide-a-way until school started. He'd search for breakfast eating food where he could find it. Many times it came from garbage cans. He carried his one pair of pants wrapped in a newspaper beneath his arm, never letting go. The school children were cruel, especially the girls. Holding their noses they'd walk behind him and shout "phew-you." "I

probably did smell, but I washed my pants in the creek and would dry them on a rock or in a tree trying to keep clean," he said.

"Most likely the principal, Thomas Sweat, knew my difficulty because he eventually arranged for me to eat a meal free at the school and he never had the window fixed," he reflected.

Sometime during the 8th grade Ernest moved back with his father to care for little Helen after their sister found the chore too difficult. For the next year Ernest tended a 40-acre farm for C.L. Williams for \$10 a month while Helen was in school. When his daddy remarried, he left to live with his paternal grandmother, Lula Harvey, and returned to school, where he was placed in the 10th grade. In addition to school, he cared for the eight people living in the house. Before daylight he was milking the cows. Then he prepared breakfast single-handedly and did the dishes before leaving for school. After school he did chores before cooking dinner for the family.

Ernest was in the 11th grade in 1943 when he was drafted into the army to serve in World War II. The following day his grandmother died and his aunt, Ruby Dopson, moved in to take over Ernest's chores.

His army stint was a primitive experience too. Placed in the field artillery in Fort Bragg, N.C., he spent 13 weeks in basic training before finding himself three weeks later fighting in Africa. Most of the men in the National Guard Division that had been activated for the emergency were much older than Ernest, serving in the Guard for years. Ernest found himself rendering service on "the Hill," a no-man's land between the American front lines and the enemy's front lines. His duties were carrying a radio pack and relaying messages back to the "howitzers" so the cannoneers could zero in on their targets. He spent two years serving on the front lines, (except for some occasional R&R), without a serious injury. (The only mishaps he experienced, he said, happened when a shell exploded in the field piece tube and burst his eardrum and when he fell from a truck and was run over.)

Upon honorable discharge in December 1945, Cpl. Harvey had earned a number of medals with stars and various combat ribbons.

After his army stint, Ernest returned to his grandmother's house, "because I didn't have anywhere else to go," he said. His Aunt Ruby, and her husband, Leon Dopson, became his second "parents" until



both of them died. "I could never repay them for the love and security they gave me," he said.

He returned to Sanderson High School and finished the 12th grade in four months, although his total schooling had only amounted to a grand total of five and a half years. After graduation, he enrolled in the University of Florida in Gainesville on the \$81 a month furnished by the GI Bill.

College life was a new experience he had not expected. Insecure, and wondering why he was even there, he marveled at the vast amount of students enrolling. He said he felt he was just an "ignorant farm boy with very little knowledge" as he sat through the entrance examinations. His grades were a minus score on all except English, and on that he made a zero.

"I simply can't explain how low I felt nor how insignificant a person I felt I was," he lamented.

One college experience will stand out in his mind forever, he said. His first English course was under the Dean of the University, Dr. Little. At the end of Ernest's first semester, Dr. Little sent for him to come to his office. Ernest wasn't even invited to sit down. The professor took a paper from his filing cabinet and asked Ernest to identify it. Ernest did. It was his last week's assignment paper he had written in response to an inquiry about his life and expectations for the future.

Dean Little told him his assignment was the most pitiful excuse for written communication that he had ever tried to read.

"He told me I was not a thief, or a robber, but my kind just never finished college," Ernest said.

But, much to Dean Little's surprise, his student did pass his English course and received a master's degree in agriculture. Ernest was the only student in the group that Dr. Little hugged.

"I immediately realized that his gruffness on my behalf woke me up and provided my inspiration to finish college. Dean Little was a wise man." And some would say Ernest was a determined man.

While in college Ernest learned to exist on one meal a day for the three years he attended before taking a break to work in a Jacksonville restaurant. During this time he met Frankie Marie Thomas while attending a church meeting at Dinkins Methodist Church south of

Sanderson. They married in June of 1949. He returned to college and received a master's degree in education, beginning his career in 1952 as a teacher of vocational agriculture in Sopchoppy, Florida. The rest of his educational career has been in Baker County, teaching sixth grade for six years in Macclenny Elementary, teaching principal in the Sanderson Junior High School (and at one time in the same room where he started the first grade in 1929. Ernest taught fifth grade one year at Macclenny Elementary before being appointed principal, where he remained for 24 years until his retirement in August 1985. In all he served more than 30 years of service in education.

Today, in 1993, Ernest piddles around his backyard garden of Eden, putting his agriculture wisdom to good use. Flowers adorn his Fifth Street resident year round and fruits and vegetables grow there annually as well. Two 20-foot deep freezers are kept full by wife Frankie who retired in 1983 after 30 years with the Baker County Health Department. The couple spends much of their time devoted to the Manntown Congregational Holiness church where they have served in various callings since 1946. (Ernest helped build portions of it, remodel parts of it, teaches Adult Sunday School Class (for 8 years) and sings in the church choir. He writes and directs inspirational plays using his own personal experiences from his teaching profession.

His greatest joy? His and Frankie's only child, a daughter, born after 16 years of marriage. Faith Miracle Harvey is now Mrs. David T. Fly and resides in Marietta, Ga., but visits her parents often.

It was at an Adult Sunday School Class Christmas Supper held at Western Sizzlin' restaurant on Lane's Ave. in Jacksonville December 19, 1987, that Ernest Harvey shared this poem with his friends and pastor the Rev. Tim Cheshire. On this special night a group of 37 people had gathered to surprise and honor him for all the work he had done through the 40 years of service he had rendered at Manntown Congregational Holiness Church. He had prepared this poem to read to his friends that night. It is a true account of his Christmas in 1933. His poem touched me deeply and it has been touching to others as I've shared it with them during the holiday season.



**THE WAY IT WAS AT MY HOUSE: Christmas 1933**

Twas fifty and four years ago  
The great Depression raged,  
Twas the year of '33  
When this plot was staged.  
We lived on the old Dick Harvey Place  
My family and I,  
Six children and mom and dad stayed  
In a house much like a sty.  
Twas a week before the Christmas day  
That grandmother came our way,  
She gave my daddy a new dollar bill  
And said she could not stay.  
But,"Earn" she said, "buy something nice,  
For these children come next week,  
They are not animals as some might think  
Attention and love they seek."  
She left us standing on the porch  
My daddy with the dollar in his hand,  
With us thinking in our souls,  
"We can get something now we know we can."  
I was 10, a brother 12 another 15,  
A sister 10 plus 7 was, and one sister 19.  
One month was our baby sister  
Too young yes, to young to know,  
That she was not included.  
In our fortune that was bestowed.  
All next week we thought and dreamed  
Just what Christmas Day would bring,  
Just what would daddy buy for us  
We'd never before gotten a thing.  
I asked my sister of 17  
What she thought would be enough  
She said, "Maybe a little jar of Pond's cold cream  
Maybe even a powder puff."

My oldest sister, bless her heart,  
Was never neat but rough,  
"Give me a whole plug of Brown Mule's tobacco  
A whole box of Navy Snuff."

My brother older than I by two  
Seemed satisfied enough,  
He said, "I'll steal the Brown Mule  
And dip my sister's snuff."  
So I thought and thought what would I get  
I'd walk around and babble,  
Whatever else would come my way,  
I wanted a big red apple.  
You see, I'd never had an apple before,  
Nor ice cream nor mashed potatoes,  
Nor bananas, grapes nor lemon pies,  
But lots of stewed tomatoes.  
Do you think on Christmas Eve  
We would hang our socks on the mantel?  
Wrong, we never had shoes to put on our feet  
So what good would socks be to handle?

So on Christmas Eve, daddy went away,  
We knew he had gone to Sanderson  
Because he rode the mule that day  
To give Raulerson's store a gander  
I knew daddy wouldn't know what to buy  
As mama did as a rule,  
But she had a baby just a month before,  
So she couldn't ride the mule.  
And on the mantel on that night  
We set our bowls and pots,  
My sisters and brothers giggled and jibed  
But for me I expected a lot.  
In our containers on Christmas morn  
Were things most people got,

Walnuts, Brazil nuts and a coconut  
Which almost filled my pot.  
There were two oranges, one chewing gum  
And hard candy galore  
But may I remind you here and now  
I expected a whole lot more.  
My big red apple could not be seen  
Nor my sister's box of Navy Snuff.  
Nor the Pond's cold cream  
Nor a lot of the other stuff.

I sneaked out of the house and stood alone  
To sort of hide my dismay,  
But then I thought one person must be happy  
On this glorious Christmas day.  
It was my mother for she had got  
The two things which filled her with glee,  
A pot cleaner to clean the pots  
A tea strainer to strain the tea.  
Now she could discard the dirty rag  
Through which she strained th tea,  
From it she made a pair of drawers  
And gave the things to me.  
I said it before and I'll say it again  
'The good ole days' were bad,  
But even with my ardent disdain,  
It was the best Christmas we'd ever had.  
My daddy had bought well for 65 cents  
But he had 35 cents more  
With which he could have bought a big red apple  
And made me smile all o'er  
But he didn't do that, no, no  
So what do you think?  
He bought a pint of moonshine  
And gave us all a drink.  
A true story.



## **ELVIE ANDERSON BYRD:**

Glen St. Mary, Cuyler 1981

*"I had a pretty good life until I was about 10 years old."*

When 18-year-old Elvie Anderson saw Travis Byrd for the first time, she told her co-workers in the Glen St. Mary Nursery greenhouse, "Hands off!! He's mine!!"

Travis Byrd was also 18 years old, a poor shy boy with patches on his faded and worn overalls, but according to Elvie, "I liked him before I even talked to him. Seemed like it was love at first sight 'cause a lot of other boys wanted to go with me, but I always said,'no'."

Born May 10, 1903, in the Cuyler section of north Baker County, Elvie was next to the youngest of 15 children born to Margaret Crews and Jacob Anderson.

"I had a pretty good life until I was about 10 years old," said Elvie as she talked in the comfort of her warm and cozy frame home in Glen St. Mary.

"Mama got sick and papa went blind and all the older ones in the family left the farm to go find work," she said.

Elvie said she was left with almost all the household chores, and, deprived of a scrubboard, she washed clothes in a wooden trough by hand or by beating them with a stick to get them clean.

"The first washing I did took me three days," she said.

"Ma worked in the fields plowing with me and my younger brother Ivy when she was able, but mostly she had asthma so bad she couldn't," said Elvie. "Ma got real sick and for two years me



**Elvie Byrd**



and Ivy would plow the ole mare every day and walk to church at night."

"Why didn't you ride the mare?" I wanted to know.

"Well, they said the ole mare was too tired," she quipped.

"My daddy would grind cane and save the skimming off the cane juice to make shine (illegal whiskey) but the law would get after him so I had to go to making it," she said, shaking her head in dismay.

"Pa, he wouldn't have made it if he'd had any other way of making money, but there weren't no other way.

"After the sheriff stopped Pa from making it, he moved the still down in a pond and left me down there to keep a fire to it. I told Pa I was scared to stay down in that pond by myself so he moved it up near the smoke house and Pa and Ivy would just watch for the sheriff."

Elvie chuckled and said, "One night I was after dark gettin' it (shine) run off and I had to keep tasting it to get it right and my brother saw me and went and told Ma. They said I was out there just a singing. Ma put me to bed. They said I was just as drunk as could be, and ma told pa if he wanted that mess run off, he'd better get someone else 'cause Elvie's not messing with that anymore."

Times got harder and harder, said Elvie.

"We didn't have any money after that, and I had to drop out of school. I didn't have shoes or money for books 'cause back then you had to buy books."

Eventually an older brother moved back home for a while to help Elvie's disabled parents.

"I went to Jacksonville to live with another brother and got me a job at a box factory," said Elvie, "but Ma wrote me a letter saying she was sick and to come home. Me and Ivy tried to make a little crop again but we didn't do too good, so that's when I went to live with my sister in Glen St. Mary and got a job working at the Glen Nursery. I walked the two miles to work and back home each day....rain or sunshine.

Elvie said she had seen Travis Byrd, "from afar on a horse going to the field to work" but on this particular day it was raining.

"He and some more boys was totin' plants in the greenhouse and us girls were puttin' claims on the ones we liked. He had patches all over his britches and was poor like my family so I just said to the other girls, "See that one there with the patches on his britches, well, he's mine.

"Not too long after that I saw him at the store in Glen and he asked me if he could walk me to the house."

Elvie married Travis within the year after a proposal one evening on the front porch of her sister's home.

"We married on the same front porch and Travis paid the Baptist preacher \$5 'cause he had to walk to get there," she said.

The newlyweds moved in with Travis's widowed mother and eventually rented a two-story home for \$7 a month, renting out the upstairs to another newlywed couple, Minnie Johns and Lloyd Townsend, for one half of the rent.

Travis, who earned \$1.75 a day, made Elvie quit her \$.75 a day job.

"He wouldn't let me work no wheres but home," said Elvie.

Travis and Elvie became the parents of seven children including one set of twins. One child was born dead. All were born home, aided by Dr. Crocket or midwives during birth.

Travis Byrd, who began working on the Glen St. Mary Nursery as a water boy at the age of seven when his father died, completed 47 years of service before his death in 1969.

"He was a good man, never did drink or anything like that," said Elvie.

Elvie said that one of her fondest memories was leaving the farm as a child and traveling to Macclenny.

"Pa'd always come to town big court time and we'd come with him in the mare and wagon. Ma would save up eggs and we'd trade 'em for icecream. I just loved going to court with Pa, just sittin' there and listening to 'em talk. I still love to go," she mused, but said 10 years had passed since her last visit.

Elvie said her parents eventually lost their farm.

"Pa thought he was a homesteader, but some man came along and said he owned it and wanted Pa to pay \$800. Pa

couldn't afford it so he and Ma sold their furniture and moved about living with us youngins," she said.

Elvie's parents are buried with grave markers in Taylor Community cemetery while their pioneering forbears are buried in a homesteaded field plot somewhere beneath the Baker County soil they helped to cultivate, their names forgotten, their hardships memories of the past.

Elvie Byrd, husband, and many of her children are buried just inside the gate at Mantown Cemetery south of Glen St. Mary.



**Jacob Anderson Family: (Left to right) Lee, Robert, Joe, Ivey,  
Elvie and Ozzie, Mother-Emma, Father-Jacob  
Horse-Maude**



## **HARLEY BURNSSED:**

Moniac 1979

*"Nope, I never heard tell of Santa Claus or Christ's birth when I was a youngin'."*

*"I reckon the Lord sent the bootlegging for a purpose after the Bo Weevil ate up all the cotton."*

**Harley Burnsed**

When Harley Burnsed was born near the Florida-Georgia state line in 1892, the area was primitive. His parents, J.L. (Jasper) Burnsed and Zelfhia Thrift were poor pioneering settlers. So were their neighbors.

"There weren't no bridges or graded roads," said Harley, who never left the area where he was born. "There weren't nothing but horse cart trails and horses or mules for transportation. Very few people had carts. My daddy was the first in the community to have a wagon."

"And," he said, "boys wore dresses back then. I was a great big boy when Mama made me a pair of knee pants. I looked down and saw 'em on me and started crying."

"My daddy grew long cotton and when we'd go into Sanderson to sell it for 5 cents a pound in the seed, we'd leave 'bout 3 a.m., before daylight. The reason I remember that so good is because my mama would fix us a good breakfast and we'd stop over by Cedar Creek to eat it. There'd always be a great big slab of white bacon and oh, my Lord, was that good...too good to even talk about," he said with a shudder, obviously overcome by the memory.

"My daddy was a great hunter," he said, "and he took me with him. None of the other kids cared to go too much. A coon hide brought 50 cents and a seven foot gator hide a dollar fifty.

"By being a good hunter we got along good in them days 'cause there weren't no laws governing the Okeefeenokee swamp

then. The bears and deer were fat on acorns and blueberries and the meat was so sweet," he said.

"How did you fare during the Depression when things were already so bad?" I asked.

"Well, the first depression I ever heard tell of was once me and my daddy was over in Moniac and there was some talk 'bout it and ole man Riley Crews spoke up and said, 'They say there's a Depression, but I can't tell no difference.' And he couldn't 'cause all we ever had to buy back then was a barrel of flour and maybe some coffee ever so often. We raised or grew or hunted the other foods we needed. We were pretty self dependent on what the land produced for us and we learned how to manage and plan for our survival.

During the late 29 and 30 years, those who could afford to hunted for bargains paid such prices as 20 cents a pound for meat. A wool blanket was \$1. An eight room dining room set cost \$50 and a 9x12 rug cost \$6. Most items came from the Sears catalog, but occasionally the rural families would travel to the big city to shop.

Harley said as a lad he made his first trip by train to Jacksonville with a school teacher. He said he "really got an education."

"I didn't even know horses wore shoes and I heard these horse and surrey buggies clopping down Bay Street, which was brick then. Boy, that was amazing to me," he said.

The first airplane and automobile didn't surprise Burnsed any.

"I knew they were coming all along, cause I read about it in the Bible," he said. "It (the Bible) says that men would go up in the air without winds and that carriages would be drawn without horses, so I was expecting it."

Harley fell in love with Lossie Rhoden, a neighbor's daughter.

"We were going to school together..and well you know what happens in school," he said. "Well that was one of the rare opportunities young people had to meet and become acquainted at that time."



"I think I got almost to the third grade before I married her on December 31, 1911," he said.

The Burnsed's began their life together as tenant farmers.

"I didn't like that too much," he said, "working for someone else. I wanted a place of my own but I only had about 30 dollars and a mule.

"About that time the Bo-weevil came into these here parts and ate up all the cotton," he said. "Bootlegging come along so I went into the bootlegging business like a lot of other people and that's how I got the money to get me some property. I reckon the Lord sent the bootlegging for a purpose after the Bo-Weevil ate up all the cotton," he said. "Ain't nary a still in these parts now adays. A lot of people abandoned their farms back then and moved away getting what they could for 'em. I know of one 350 acre farm that sold for \$400 and the man moved to Macclenny and plowed other people's gardens with his mule up 'til he died. That's all he'd ever done and all he knew to do to make a living."

The Burnseeds became the parents of seven children, five girls and two boys. Lossie lived to see her first grandchild. After Lossie's death, Harley married Margie Padget. That was 20 years ago.

Harley said he was a grown man before he heard about Santa Claus. Even the real meaning and significance of Christmas eluded Burnsed until he had a family of his own.

"Nope, I never heard tell of Santa Claus, or Christ's birth when I was a youngin'," the amicable 87-year-old Moniac native said. "When I did hear tell of it (Santa and Christmas) I thought it was a mighty nice thing for kids. I still do," he said, explaining there was no big meal prepared for the occasion in his childhood home. "We did know to exchange gifts, but I was never told why. If my parents knew they didn't tell me. We made our own gifts because there sure wern't no place around to buy anything. Me being the oldest of my parents children would go into the swamp and cut down black gum trees to build wagons and other toys."

"I had a good time all my life," he said, "growing corn, peanuts, cane, raising hogs, cows, and now goats."



### **Harley Burnsed**

He said he never joined a church although there were all kinds of people coming 'round wantin' me to join up. I tell 'em I don't have time. I'm too busy taking sick people to the doctor and the Lord's taking care of me." He admits he is basically hardshell Baptist and says he's read the Bible through twice.

Failing eyesight prevents him from doing many of the things he would like to do, but he still manages to laugh and tell about the good ole days.

"What are you telling her?" quizzed his wife Margie as she returned from a shopping trip to Macclenny.

"O, I told her the facts," he jovially replied, "but I could tell her some really big stories," he said with a twinkle in his eye.

"You see, once there was this really big bear and me and my daddy.....!"

Update 1993: Harley Burnsed who was born Oct. 12, 1892 died July 1989 at the age of 96 two months from his 97th birthday. He is buried at Oak Grove Cemetery north of Macclenny.

His children are: Rosa Thomas, Lottie Thrift (died 1992), Willard Burnsed, Nathan Burnsed, Geneva Griffin, Minnie Johns, Edna Sands.

## **MYRTIE (Taylor) WALKER-ROWE:**

Cuyler section of Baker County: Macclenny

*"Once I danced a hole right through my new pat'en leather sandals."*

Fun loving, congenial, and witty, Myrtie Rowe grew up in the Cuyler section of north Baker County. She was one of 13 children born to Robert E. Taylor and his wife Blanche Elizabeth Williams who owned a grist mill and country store in Taylor. Friends and neighbors often gathered at her parent's farm home to play the piano and sing. They played games, had cane grindings, peanut boilings and peanut parchings. There were no cars in those days. Friends came by mule and wagon or by horseback. Some even walked. She remembers that it was the good life. It began on September 26, 1906.



**Myrtie Rowe**

"You couldn't go too far from home in those days," said Myrtie speaking of the turn of the century times. "There were only about two cars in the whole community and most everyone travelled by mule and wagon.

"It was especially exciting to visit Macclenny and see the train go by," she said. "We'd have to really hold on to our mule."

School for Myrtie was a three room school house not far from her home.

"But when I spent the night away from home with friends we'd have to get up before daylight, fix our breakfast and pack our lunch and start walking in the dark to get to school on time.



"We'd have the best school plays, and more fun than you can imagine. Nothing compares to it today. They were absolutely the greatest. We'd put our whole heart into it.

"We'd carry a lunch bucket to school everyday and eat on the playground with the hogs and all," she said. "Once a hog grabbed my sandwich right out of my hand and took hold of my finger and all. I still have the scar," she laughed holding up the injured and scared finger as proof.

"Young people back then really enjoyed going to church. We'd walk to Sunday School in the mornings but go back in the mule and wagon at night. Services started about 7:30 p.m. but lasted until after midnight," she said, explaining that after the preaching, the altar call was held.

"On our way home at night us kids would lay down in the back of the wagon and look up at the stars."

As Myrtie grew into her teens her attention began to turn toward the boys, one in particular who lived across the branch.

"I could see Verg plowing in the fields each day as I was grinding corn at the mill," she said. "He was older than me and already had a girl friend. Sometimes they'd come over to my house to play the organ and sing and she'd call me her little girl. It turned out her 'little girl' was in love with her feller.

"I remember one time I was having to plow corn and I saw Verg driving by in his mule and wagon going someplace. I didn't want him to see me plowing so I hid behind the barn with the mule and plow until he passed on by."

Courtin' was done in groups those days, Myrtie explained.

"We'd have bon fires out in the yard, play games, go to cane grindings, candy pullings and peanut boiliings, " she said

"Mama didn't believe in dancing, but we'd go to things that turned into it", she said explaining that the boys would come by in a wagon gathering up the girls to help 'hull peanuts' or any other kind of help neighbors might need.

"Back then everyone pitched in to help neighbors," she reflected.

"After we finished up our peanut hulling or what ever we'd been called on to do," she continued, "We'd somehow get into square dancing.



"Once I danced a hole right through the bottom of my new pat'en leather sandals. We only got two pairs of shoes a year and I was scared to death mama would find out. When I got home I patched them up with some leather we had, but she noticed anyway," recalling that the scolding she got from her mama wasn't too bad.

"Mama was the boss when it came to saying what we did," explained Myrtie. "Pa always said, 'It's ok with me if it's ok with your Mama."

"I remember once my daddy was camping out in the woods, cutting cross ties with some hired hands. I had gone to a peanut hulling and afterwards it just turned into a square dance. I looked up and there stood Pa."

He said, "What are you doing here? I'm going to tell your Mama."

I said, "What are you doing here? You ain't supposed to be here either."

That was the last she heard of that.

When Myrtie reached eighth grade that was as high as the Cuyler school taught. Plans were made for her to go live with a brother in Okeechobee, Florida to further her education. This news soon reached Verg, who, with his brother Ira, had gone into the grocery business in Macclenny. The year was 1925. The couple had other plans in mind.

"I remember one morning I was working out in the field hoeing peanuts with Mama and I asked her if she could afford a piece of material to make me a dress, and she said she could. It was blue crepe material. I made a beautiful dress out of it and Fannie Dinkins (Rhoden-Taylor) made my hat covered with material that looked like lace. It was wide brim and so pretty.

"Verg had gone to town for a load of merchandise one Wednesday morning and when he came back he said to me, 'Let's get married now'", recalled Myrtie.

"Well I usually went to prayer meeting on Wednesday night but instead I accompanied Verg to Macclenny and we went to Judge Milton's house about midnight and got married."

The couple then drove to Jacksonville and spent their honeymoon night in the Aragon Hotel.

"Of course I didn't feel too good the next morning but we got a load of groceries and came back to Macclenny and went to work." (Bacon sold for five cents a pound and 25 pounds of flour cost seventy-five cents in those days.)

The popular couple moved into an upstairs room in a house occupied by Verge's brother Ira and his wife Eva on South College Street. "We all cooked and ate together," smiled Myrtie. "We all got along well together."

In 1927 Myrtie and Verg built the home she presently occupies on south College Street.

All Myrtie and Verge's children were born at home delivered by Dr. Brinson.

"Mama wouldn't let me get up for two weeks after a birth, and I had to keep a tight band around my stomach. Now-a-days they bring babies to church a few days old.

Four children blessed their marriage which lasted a short twelve years. One morning, while Myrtie was preparing breakfast, Verg had a heart attack and died.

Myrtie sold the store and went to work. Later, she married Charlie Rowe, a sawmill man, and opened another store. With Charlie's two children and her four, they lived next door to their business and raised their family.

Twenty-five years later, her second husband suffered a heart attack and died.

In 1993 Myrtie still lives in the same house occupied with memories. She spends her time in community and Church of God activities.

She has been a past president of the Macclenny Woman's Club, past chairman of the county Red Cross, President for the County Council on Aging and President of the Church of God Ladies Auxiliary for 28 years.

Her love and devotion for people is evident in the service she renders. Friends say she is the type of person you can depend on day or night to help out when needed.

"I wouldn't have it any other way," she contends. "My life in Baker County has been good."

If she had her life to live over what would she do differently?

"I'd get me a better education. I wouldn't change anything else. I've had a happy life. I only wish Verg had lived to see his children grow up. Bernice (Mrs. Ray) Green, (Vernon died at age 37, Claudell and Virgil Eugene (Speck) survive.

Charlie's children, who seem like her own, are Carolyn (Mrs. Dwight) Jones and Myrna Jean (Davis).

Any regrets?

"No."

Only one incident stands out in her mind that she feels strongly about.

"I should have taken my children to church more when they were younger," she mused.

There was a reason she was not active in church for awhile.

"I went to a square dance with Verg," she explained. "The deacons came to see me and ask me if I was going to go. I told them I might. I knew if I didn't go someone else would go with him."

She went!

Her name was removed from the church roll. Fifteen years later, at a church revival, she rejoined and was rebaptized.

"I didn't think the Lord would punish me for dancing. I didn't think it was wrong because I enjoyed it. It was good clean fun...a lot better than what young people do now."

Times and attitudes may have changed from the days of frolic and midnight church altar calls, but one thing hasn't changed, and that's Myrtie Taylor-Walker Rowe. She leaves a legacy of inestimable spiritual wealth, the kind that qualifies it to be said, "Well done, thy good and faithful servant."

#### FOOTNOTE '93.

Myrtie's father Robert E. Lee Taylor was born September 17, 1873 and died June 29, 1955. His wife Blanch Elizabeth Williams Taylor

was born May 12, 1875 and died March 11, 1951. They are buried in Taylor Cemetery north of Glen St. Mary.

Virgil (Verge) Dupont Walker's father James Benjamin Walker and his wife Claudia Lillian Dinkins Walker. She was born Feb. 26, 1875 and died April 11, 1958. They are buried in Woodlawn Cemetery.

Virgil (Verge) Dupont Walker was born July 25, 1899 and died March 4, 1937. He is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery south of Macclenny. Myrtie was born September 26, 1906.

Myrtie and Verge's four children are:

BERNICE MARIE WALKER MILTON GREEN Born Nov. 28, 1925.

Married (2) Shannon Ray Green, Jr. Born May 1, 1922

Their children are:

(1) Marsha Dean Milton Williams. Born May 29, 1944

Married Sherrel Vernon Williams. Born Jan. 3, 1944

Their children:

Amy Elizabeth Williams, born April 5, 1971, Sherrel Andrew Williams, born May 2, 1974.

(2) Deborah Green Lamb, born April 21, 1950.

Married Danny George Lamb, born May 22, 1950

Their children:

Deborah Leigh Lamb, Nov. 20, 1979

Jeffery Beau Lamb, Jan. 16, 1976

(3) Raymond Walker Green born July 10, 1955

Married Kim Dianne Sloan, born Jan. 1, 1957

Their children:

Shanna Rae Green, born Jan 10, 1980

Kellen Walker Green, born Jan. 14, 1983.

VERNON D. WALKER born May 16, 1927, died April 10, 1968

Married Willa Jean Malone on August 9, 1945

Willa Jean Malone was born December 3, 1928

Their five children are:

(1) Vernon D. Walker, Jr. born May 28, 1948

Married Charlotte Anne Bush born August 16, 1949

Their two children are:

David Bush Walker born Aug. 10, 1978

Courtney Ann, born Dec. 4, 1981



(2) Penny Walker Katsacos born June 2, 1952

Married James A. Katsacos born Aug. 2, 1928, died April 30, 1986

Their two children are:

William Nicholas Katsacos born July 2, 1980

Joseph Walker Katsacos born March 13, 1983

(3) William Keith Walker, born Oct. 24, 1954

Married Tracy Lynn Baylis born Aug. 22, 1957

Their two children are:

Jamie Lynn Walker born March 25, 1984

Robert James Walker born May 21, 1988

(4) Edwin Kevin Walker born Oct. 24, 1954

Married Brenda Sue Davis, born August 4, 1959

Their three children:

Kendra Lee Walker, born June 7, 1982

Kari Marie Walker born March 10, 1986

Vernon Jason Walker born June 9, 1988

(5) Jean Marie Walker born Oct. 4, 1957

Married Michael E. Brazell born June 21, 1952.

Their three children:

Jeffrey Brazell born Jan. 20, 1983

Julie Marie Brazell born Feb. 5, 1985

Walker Brazell born Nov. 18, 1986.

CLAUDELL WALKER born Aug. 25, 1929 in Macclenny, Fl.

Married Endia June Yarborough on April 23, 1949 in Macclenny

June Walker, born Feb. 23, 1930 in Jacksonville, Fl.

Their two children are:

(1) Claude Michael Walker, born June 7, 1951 in Jacksonville.

Married Wanda Jean Raulerson born March 23, 1951 in Sanderson

Their children are:

Claudette Michelle Walker born Apr. 24, 1975 in Jacksonville

Rita Marie Walker born Nov. 9, 1977 in Jacksonville

(2) Mark Duane Walker born Nov. 6, 1955 in Jacksonville

Married Susan Gail Harvey Dec. 24, 1975 in Macclenny

Susan Gail Harvey born Nov. 18, 1955 in Jacksonville

Their three children are:

Joshua Kyle Walker, born July 30, 1983 in Gainesville, Fl.

Natalie Laine Walker born Apr. 21, 1985 in Gainesville

Jeremy Dean Walker born Nov. 20, 1987 in Gainesville

VIRGIL EUGENE WALKER born June 18, 1934

Married (1) Mary Taylor on June 18, 1955

Their two children:

(1) Mary Kay Walker born Dec. 15, 1956

Married David Unkelbach, born Feb. 28, 1951

Their son Dane Taylor Unkelbach was born June 5, 1989

(2) Jeana Elizabeth born May 6, 1961

Married Phil Duval, born Jan. 15, 1966

Their son Klate Taylor Duval was born July 16, 1991

Virgil Eugene Walker married (2) to Susie Chesser-Lloyd-Lott. She was born June 28, 1944.

CHARLIE ROWE and his first wife NELLIE MARGARET HICKS two children:

(1) Carolyn Jane Rowe born June 15, 1933 in Macclenny

Married Dwight Wiley Jones on June 7, 1951 in Folkston, Ga.

Dwight was born June 5, 1931. in Macclenny son of D.J. and Maude (Fraser) Jones.

Their four sons are:

Charles Dwight Jones born Sept. 26, 1955 in Jacksonville

Married (1) Patricia Matthews born Sept. 3, 1956

Their son Allen Lee, born June 18, 1973 in Jacksonville

Married (2) Patricia McCrorey born April 6, 1957

Daughter Megan Leann born April 1, 1989 in Jacksonville

Dwight W. Jones, Jr. born Mar. 4, 1962 in Jacksonville

Married Karin Elfers born September 10, 1963

Rowe Dwight Jones born Dec. 18, 1967 in Jacksonville.

(2) Myrna Jean Rowe born Feb. 8, 1935 in Macclenny

Married James Irvin Davis born Dec. 16, 1916, died March 7, 1981.

Charile John Rowe was born Dec. 4, 1900 in Macclenny and died Mar 3, 1963. His first wife Nellie Margaret Hicks was born on April 11, 1914 and died May 7, 1982. Both are buried in Woodlawn Cemetery south of Macclenny.

## IDA MAY PADGETT:

Macclenny 1979

*"Once when I was a young girl, I went dancing at the Power's house. When Mama found out I was dancing, well, I still haven't forgotten to this day."*

Ida May Padgett was born in the last of the 19th century. She has lived to see fifteen Presidents preside over the United States, six states join the Union, the invention of the airplane and automobile, and experience turn of the century progress in Baker County.

"I tell everyone I'm sixteen years old," she said with a twinkle in her eye.

"It's okay with me if they want to believe it."

A Baker County native, Ida Mae Matthews was born May 9, 1893, in Macclenny, the daughter of Frank H. Matthews and Ida Estelle Corbett.

"My dad was killed when I was six years old," she said, explaining he was a Union machinist with the Illinois Central Railroad and lost his life when shot by a Scab during a strike.

"My father was born in Chicago, Illinois, but moved with his parents to Baker County in 1890," she said. "His father, James Bosworth Matthews, was originally from Lockport, New York, and was in the newspaper business in Chicago when he and his wife, French Canadian Margaret Newman, moved to Florida. He was editor of the Baker County newspaper until his death," she said.



**Ida May Padgett**

Meanwhile, Charles C. Corbett had left his native state of Vermont with his wife, Zilphia Crowningshield. A stone cutter and funeral director, Charles moved his family to Baker County where he became the first known county "undertaker" about 1880. Many of the county's older grave markers were engraved by him.

It was in Baker County that Matthews' son, Frank, met Corbett's daughter, Ida. They married in 1890. A son, Frank Maynard, who died in the 1918 flu epidemic, preceded his sister, Ida Mae, in birth.

Ida May grew up under the scrutinizing eyes of her strict mother.

"Once when I was a young girl, I went dancing at the ole Powers' house," said Ida. "When Mama found out I was dancing...well, I still haven't forgotten to this day."

Several years after the death of her father, Ida's mother married Cecil M. Corbett, a first cousin, quite common in those days. They had two daughters, Edweena and Carmeeta.

"After the death of my grandfather, Charles C. Corbett, my mother took over as the funeral director," said Ida May. ( The original old records of many burials within the county, in many cases the only record made of the person's death, are in her custody).

Ida Estelle inherited all the west half of Lot 27 in Macclenny and the original home built on the corner of Sixth Street and Macclenny Avenue. Eventually it was inherited by her daughter, Ida May, who still enjoys the large spacious home with its inviting front porch and comfortable rocking chairs. It is the only original dwelling still remaining on the main street of town.

Speaking of growing up in Macclenny, Ida remembers, "It was different in those days. We had terrible fires then, destroying homes and businesses," she said with a shudder. A frail woman, now eighty-six years young, Ida said when the old Macclenny hotel burned, she stayed inside her home and wouldn't go look as everyone else. "I feared the fires," she said, adding, "and I still fear them today."

As a young girl, Ida was one of three employees in the old Baker County State Bank which eventually folded.



"I took care of the deposits and bank statements," she said. "I still have some of the old stocks.

"I didn't do too much courtin' in those days," she explained. "There wasn't any place for us to go."

Meanwhile, Baker County had employed a school teacher by the name of Barney Padgett. He and his wife, Viva, were friends of Ida. When Viva took ill, Ida helped care for her friend. When Viva died, little did Ida dream she would become the next wife of Barney Padgett.

"He was the kindest and most gentle man I'd ever met," said Ida. "My mother liked him and approved of our relationship. We were married August 6, 1919," she recalled. "Our marriage lasted 49 years."

Ida moved with him to Archer and Tallahassee while he was employed with the State Department of Education. Eventually they moved back to Macclenny where he became the first principal of the Macclenny School, as well as coach of the first basketball team.

Barney Padgett wasn't an ordinary man.

"Daddy always left his problems on the door step," said his daughter, Mary Estelle Ferry. "I was grown before I realized he could have had problems. He always had a smile."

Barney Padgett was known as a humanitarian. He was honest and loved his fellow man. Born April 26, 1886, in Suwannee County, he was the son of Millard Padgett and Mary Smith, an orphan. "He loved Baker County and the people," said Ida. "This is where he wanted to live."

The people of Baker County loved and admired Barney Padgett. He was elected their State Representative in the late 20's and served as heir mayor.

He went into the Naval Store business and opened an abstract company. His daughter Mary Estelle continued in this work.

In 1930 the fire Ida so dreaded destroyed their home.

"Daddy had a vast collection of books," remembered Mary Estelle. "We were not worried about our clothes and toys, but we cried about daddy's books," she said.

When the fire destroyed their home they moved into the house where Ida grew up on Main Street Macclenny. They lived there with her mother. They never moved again.

The house has been kept basically the same.

"It's just the same as when we lived here as children," said Mary Estelle, "except daddy's not here."

Barney Padgett, one of Baker County's most beloved citizens died in 1968.

"Mama has never thrown anything away," said her daughter, a collector of the past herself.

Ida May Padgett is possessive of her collectibles. She lovingly takes her Bible, held together with a rubber band, down from the shelf. "They're all in here," she says, opening it to a page with neatly penned names and dates.

A stimulating story goes with each.

"One of Mama's great, great, great grandfathers was Johann Crowningshield (originally spelled Kronshell) an immigrant from Germany," said Mary Estelle. "He was a doctor and met his wife, Elizabeth Allen, when she was a patient and he had saved her life. They had a son Richard, a distiller, and his son, Richard the Second, was a clothing manufacturer. Once he designed and made a dress for his sister to wear to a ball in Boston attended by George Washington, and she danced with him. One of Richard's sons was William, whose daughter, Zilphia, became Mama's grandmother and moved to Baker County," related Mary Estelle.

Mementos abound in the Padgett home.

Pictures of ancestors adorn the walls, as well as photos of her children during various ages of their lives. Whatnots and knick-knacks remain in the same position they were placed decades ago. Nothing changes, except time.

Not even Ida May Matthews Padgett. The same principles and standards of puritan life handed down to her for generations remain the same. She has instilled them in her children. And they are grateful.

Still believing as her husband Barney did, that most men's word was to be accepted until proven wrong, she quipped when

asked what she thought about man's declaration that he had made a flight to the moon during her lifetime.

"Well, if they say they did, I'll just have to take their word for it."

Ida Padgett is one of the last 19th century Baker County natives. Her legacy will remain long after the knickknacks are gone. The contributions Ida and Barney Padgett have made to the growth of Baker County will be seen and felt as long as there is a Baker County.

Footnote 1993: Ida May Matthews's parents were Frank H. Matthews and Ida Estelle Corbett. Her paternal grandparents were James B. Matthews and Margaret Newman, her paternal great grandparents were Isaac Matthews and Mary Bosworth. Margaret Newman's parents were William Newman and Eleanor Channon. Ida May's maternal grandparents were Charles C. Corbett and Zilphia Crowingshield. Charles parents were Willard Corbett and Hannah Estey. Zilphia's parents were William Crowingshield and Tirzah McDaniel.

Her husband B.J. Padgett's parents were Millard B. Padgett and Mary Smith (she was an orphan) her lineage is unknown. Millard's parents were Andrew Padgett and Elizabeth Green. (Her parents unknown). Andrew padgett's parents were Elijah Padgett and Sussanah Station.





# **ANNIE (GIVENS) BLUE, SON BENNIE BLUE**

OF SANDERSON, FLORIDA 1980

*"You recon you need be telling that Benny?"*

**Annie Blue**

*"She wants to know the history mama and that's the truth."*

**Bennie Blue**

Ninety-year-old Annie Blue leaned steadily against her cane for support, peering suspiciously at the white stranger.

"What she want to know Bennie?" she said, her light brown eyes sparkling with inquisitiveness.

"She want to know 'bout your life Mama," replied her 65-year-old son, speaking loud and distinct into his aged mother's ear.

"You know Mama, when you were a little girl livin' with your Mama and Daddy."

"I knows all 'bout that, I can remember that good," the sprightly little lady said proudly.

Annie Blue walked slowly to the small front porch and took a seat in an old, wooden rocking chair and motioned for Bennie to sit beside her. Then with shoulders straightened and a slight smile on her petite face began talking about her father, Archie Givens Sr., and her mother, Carrie Dallas.

"I was the oldest of their five children," she began. "I was born August 30, 1890, 'cause we wrote it down in the family Bible."

"That's what they say," Bennie agreed.

Annie said she was born on homesteaded property in a small wooden shack about a mile north of Sanderson.

"It's known as the Sanderson Negro quarters," explained Bennie, glancing around his little plot of land.

"It's been here as long as I can remember. My mama grew up here and I grew up here too," he said, explaining that his grand-

father Archie Givens homesteaded land in the quarters more than 100 years ago.

"He gave mama and daddy five acres when they got married and my daddy bought another five acres later," he said.

Annie's clear and twinkling eyes observed her son closely, straining to hear what he was telling the white stranger. An occasional nod indicated she understood some of the interview.

Bennie said that Annie's father peddled his freshly butchered beef and pork through the quarters into Sanderson and sometimes Glen St. Mary by mule and wagon to earn money for his family.

"Weren't no ice back then," he said, "but he'd usually sell it all in a day."

Annie married share cropper Owen Blue. Their son Benjamin was born February 15, 1915.

"I lived with 'em 40 years before I ever left home," said Bennie. "Before I married out I went to school and learned to read and write. I was 20 years old when I married. I was with my wife 38 years and had eight children before she died."

Bennie said his parents ran a small one-room grocery store when he was a boy.

"That's why I ain't got no teeth now, I ate too much candy," he said.

What was growing up in the Sanderson Negro quarters like?

"Well, when I was big enough to get out from under my mama I went looking for entertainment," said the amicable Bennie. "We'd walk to Woodstock after a big pay day and somebody would have a little place fixed up to dance with some music," he said. "They'd sell soda water and crackers and peanuts and stuff like that. Mama used to get at me about being off late usually after midnight, and," Bennie admitted, "sometimes it was just before daylight before I'd get home. Actually boys weren't mischievous back then like they are now. There weren't no fightin' and killin' like now."

Bennie said pay day was the biggest night in the quarters.

"The older heads usually gambled, but us boys and girls just danced," he said.

Bennie said that girls from the quarters usually were not allowed to attend any activity other than church after dark.

"There were women around though," he said laughing. "The quarter owners would bring in women from different places and furnish them a big house and food from the commissary. See, you ain't got to worry about the men stayin' on and workin' as long as they's got women around. Men could go to that house and sit down in the yard or on the porch and talk and that's how they'd get to meet somebody they liked. They'd eventually take 'em to a house in the quarters where they'd live together like man and wife. They didn't marry 'em with a preacher."

"You reckon' you need be tellin' that Bennie?" his mother spoke up.

"She wants to know the history mama and that's the truth, that's how it happened, that's the way it was mama," he said. "Them women that were brought in here could do like they wanted to, but them in the quarters made their daughters come in at dark."

"Every now and then us boys would get to walk into Sanderson or to Woodstock with the girls but it would be more than one of us. You'd just know the one you'd be trying to make it with and you'd kinda walk along with her. Them girls had to be in the house behind closed doors after dark," he said. "We couldn't walk off no place less it was church and even then we could walk ahead of 'em or behind 'em and when you walked 'em home you got to the door and turned around and left. I lived around my wife all my life. Her daddy was dead, but I went in to see her mama and grandma for her company one day. They gave her release to me and that meant that if anything happened it would be on me, cause I was responsible for us. We still couldn't stay out late," he said, adding, "We had a schedule."

Bennie eventually asked to marry Jessie Perkins.

"Her mother studied it and said she hated to part with her but if that's what we wanted to do it was OK."

Bennie and Jessie were married in the Macclenny courthouse by Judge Brown.

"She wore a white dress with ruffles," he remembered. "Mama and daddy gave us a room with them. After the birth of four of our eight children they moved their little store in our room and let me and Jessie have the larger room where the store was."

Bennie and Jessie raised eight children in the 12x18 room that contained two beds, a stove, table and chairs.

"After about 20 years we sold that old place and bought another store. I built me this home I'm livin' in and mama and daddy built a small grocery there," he said pointing across a small field.

"Up 'til that time I'd always been right in the house with my parents," he said with pride.

And a big smile crossed Annie Blue's lips as she looked lovingly at her son.

Bennie said he left three years later and moved to Pompano Beach where he managed to financially take better care of his family.

"My daddy died while I was there and mama wanted me to move back home," he said.

In 1972 Jessie had a stroke and died. Later Bennie remarried Callie Mae Jefferson from Pensacola.

"Me and mama's got a little garde. That's her cane patch over there. She planted it herself, and we goin' to make us some syrup. We got us a small patch of greens planted and a few chickens too," he said pointing to the side yard.

"I don't have no car and I'm disabled now," said Bennie, "but I can help mama some. She still sweeps and hoes," he said.

Annie Blue nodded her head in agreement and smiled.

FOOTNOTE: Annie Blue died in 1983. Bennie Blue and his wife Callie Mae still live in the same house where this interview took place.



# **William Clyburn and Willie Mae (Mathews) Gilbert**

Macclenny 1992

*"Macclenny was very primitive when we moved here. In the early days there were men all over town with big pistols hanging out their pocket,"*

**Will Gilbert**

*"The hook worm problem was terrible,"*

**Willie Mae**

William Clyburn Gilbert and Willie Mae Mathews have been sweethearts from the time that she was 11 and he was 13. Today they live together in the house they moved into on the corner of Seventh and McIver Streets in 1937. It is filled with memories on the walls, in curio cabinets, and all around each room. Mostly it is filled with unseen memories deeply rooted in their hearts. Memories they have built together for more than 66 years.

It was 1923 when the Mathews family moved to Macclenny from Green Cove Springs. According to Willie Mae, there were 981 people living in the town. Her father, William Lion Mathews, was in the hardware business. Highway 90 was in the process of being paved, but all the other streets were unpaved and very sandy. Cows and hogs often lay in the path of



**William & Willie Mae Gilbert**

Photo Courtesy of Baker County Standard

the Maxwell and Nash cars that rumbled down the unpaved streets.

"My daddy had to stop our car many times and get a stick and get them out of our way," remembered Willie Mae.

Her family was among the first in the city to have indoor plumbing. She remembers her young friend Mae Henderson (later Mae Powers) visiting and exclaiming, "Now you won't have to go to the river to take a bath."

"My family didn't go to the river anyway," smiled Willie Mae. "We had large wash tubs we used, but most people went down to the river when they needed a bath, taking their soap and a towel with them," she said. The river was the St. Marys River that divides Glen and Macclenny. That's where the "wash hole" was located!

Willie Mae had established a special relationship with William Gilbert years before when they both lived in Georgia, and even though their lives had taken different avenues for awhile, they often saw each other when Willie Mae would visit her grandmother in Helena, Ga. Will Gilbert has done many things in his life and one was to join the Merchant Marines. At the age of 19, he began traveling all over the world seeing exciting and interesting things. He took a year out to attend Georgia Tech. Then he rejoined the Marines and went back to traveling.

In 1926, he came home long enough to marry Willie Mae. After that the two often met in ports when his ship would dock. Eventually though, Will left the Merchant Marines and they moved to Jacksonville where he worked in the Ford Plant. In 1935, they moved to Macclenny. The country was in a Depression and Will took a job selling sewing machines. He held three licenses in engineering and Willie Mae remembers once when he was called to help out in the Jacksonville Shipyard to work on some big ship engines. He arrived there on Sunday afternoon and because several of the men had the flu, he was asked to stay and work some overtime. With only two hours sleep at night he finally finished on Wednesday. When he arrived home Willie Mae met him at the door with a bar of soap and a towel.

"He was so dirty, plain black, and I sent him to the wash hole down at the river to bathe."

"Yes and it took about three good scrubblings before I got myself clean," he said.

He was so exhausted he slept 24 hours.

Living in Macclenny had its problems. Very few people had toilet facilities. Will Gilbert was contracted by the government to build outdoor privies for the people.

"I dug the holes 6 feet deep and 30 inches in diameter," he said.

"The hook worm problem was terrible," remembers Willie Mae. "People used little houses that looked like a chicken coop, or just went in their yards. It was a mess. The government was trying to eradicate the hook worm problem by building out door privies," she said. "Those little out-houses were a big modern convenience for many of the citizens at that time."

Will Gilbert opened up a hardware-general store in 1935 with \$55.60 in supplies. "They said I wouldn't be there but two months, and I was there 38 years," he said. By chance he got into the house moving business when a local merchant friend asked him for a favor.

"I had a big 7 by 22 foot trailer," he said, "and Leo Dykes asked me if I would go to Woodstock (near Lake City) and move a house that was only 14 by 18 feet. It was 1938 and a hurricane was sweeping through south Florida, the backlash hitting Baker County. I braced the walls of the little house and left it half on and half off the trailer until the winds subsided. When I returned the house had over turned, but the fireplace and everything else was still in place. Today the little house still stands in Macclenny."

That incident led to other requests for house moving and the beginning of a long and successful career. He had moved the first house for \$35 but said he lost money, so when he was approached by Mr. Dykes the second time, the price had gone up. He charged \$75 for the next two he moved and bought two jacks to replace the 4x4s he was using. During the next 21 years, he moved 4,300 houses and buildings. He takes understandable pride in telling about moving a hospital in Madison with the patients still in it.

"One man died and one baby was born during the move 305 feet away," he noted. "About 25 or 30 people from Baker County



went just to see me do he." The building weighed 250,000 pounds.

Once he moved a house in Baldwin. The owner had been gathering eggs. After the house was moved two miles away and crossed a ditch, an egg and glass of water were still on the table inside the dwelling."

His motto: "The impossible we do it once, but a miracle takes longer."

The Gilberts were active in the community. With the late Vera Holt and Mrs. Ida (Will) Knabb, Willie Mae, who was the PTA president, started a soup kitchen for the children.

"We held interviews with the children and asked them about their lunch. We found that most of them just had a cold biscuit and a piece of bacon, and some just had a sweet potato. It was obvious their diets were inadequate so we were able to get the school board to build us a small room with a stove, sink, and counter. It became known as the soup kitchen because we served the children a free bowl of hot vegetable soup and a glass of milk daily," she said, explaining that Mrs. Ida Knabb had many cows and furnished much of the milk.

Eventually, soup kitchens were built for the children in Olustee and Sanderson. The Sanderson soup kitchen was later moved by Will to Macclenny and today is occupied by their long-time family maid Mattie Josey.

The Gilberts prospered. They bought a summer home in Fernandina and as their family grew to five (a sixth child died young) they spent many hours during the hot summer months at the beach. Will often let his employee drive a truck full of town children to Macedonia to swim in the "wash hole."

"I can't ever remember anyone of them thanking me, but not long ago Barry Rhoden told me how much he appreciated it and what it had meant to him and his family, and it made me feel good."

Macclenny had a movie house owned by Earl Chessman, but according to Willie Mae it was "full of bed bugs." In those days a lot of people had bed bugs in their beds and they'd get on the children's clothes and spread where ever they went, she said.



"The children would come home covered with them and I wouldn't let them come in until I sprayed them with a spray pump. I hated to deprive them of the joy of going to the movies, so I just sprayed them when they got home."

The Gilberts' said almost all the people who lived in Macclenny when they first arrived are now dead.

"We've outlived almost every one of them," said Willie Mae.

"Macclenny was very primitive when we moved here," said Will. "In the early days there were men all over town with big pistols hanging out of their pockets."

"Yes, and late at night you could hear them going off," said Willie Mae. "They'd get at one end of town and fire a shot signaling that the coast was clear and then you could hear cars going down the road with their load of moonshine."

Will Gilbert said he remembers when two of the shine cars had a wreck and turned over. At the funeral the minister looked down on the bodies and said, "All dressed up and nowhere to go."

"I was told that 10,000 gallons of moonshine passed through Macclenny every week," he said.

"Right after we moved to Macclenny, the sheriff died from moonshine poisoning," said Willie Mae. She couldn't remember his name.

While passing through customs in New York once, Willie Mae said a custom's officer was inspecting a bottle of wine she was bringing to her husband. Noting she was from Baker County, Fla., he asked her: "Why do you need this wine with all the moonshine you've got in Baker County."

"I never realized until then we were famous," she said.

The Gilberts remember the 1938 fire that destroyed a city block in Macclenny.

"I'd just received a big shipment of galvanized tubs and buckets," he said. "We took them all up on the roof, filled them with water from a hose and took wet brooms to put out the sparks that were hurled from across the street. Our efforts saved the fire from spreading," he said. Destroyed in the blaze was the whole city block where the current Standard Building stands. Will's store was located where the office of Dr. Gary Dopson is presently located.

Ice cream was delivered to Macclenny by train every weekend, said Willie Mae. There was a little ice cream store down by the railroad station and everyone would rush down to buy some. "That was the only time we got any, and that was such a treat for us," she noted.

During the war, the Gilberts said dances were held at the Womans Club and servicemen from Cecil Field would come to Macclenny to dance with the girls. "The boys didn't like that," she said.

The Naval Air Station in Lake City would send a bus over every week to pick up the Baker County girls and their chaperons to attend dances, the Gilberts explained. "I wasn't afraid to let our oldest daughter go, things were not as dangerous back then, and I trusted the chaperons," said Willie Mae. She remembered two of the escorts as Doris Crocket and Eva Ward.

The Gilbert's five children all live in other areas, but come home often for visits. The oldest, Anita (Mrs. George) Gerson and Rachel (Mrs. Herb) Nasrallah live in Tampa. Charlotte Ramirez lives in Valdosta, Margaret (Mrs. William) Fusse lives in Hendersonville, Tenn., and son Peake and his wife Eleanor live in Fayetteville, Ga., where he works for Delta Airlines.

They have 17 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren. When Willie Mae turns 90 years old on Nov. 14 they'll all be home to celebrate. They have outgrown the house now and the Gilberts are grateful for the nearby motels that help provide sleeping space.

Last September the Gilberts celebrated 66 years of marriage.

"We don't have any boxing gloves so we don't fight," said the jovial Will.

The Gilberts' are Episcopalian. Will built the quaint little brick church that stands at the corner of Fifth and Minnesota Streets in 1967 after a fire destroyed the frame one. A Jacksonville firm wanted \$650 to build and install the beams. Will took three hours to design the equipment to fashion the beams and three hours to install them. They acquired their beautiful century-old stained glass windows from St. Andrew's Church, which was being torn down in Jacksonville.

"Those bricks were supposed to be my new brick home," said Willie Mae, "but I didn't mind him building the church with them."

The Gilberts' are truly builders of varying degrees. The homes, churches and businesses will eventually crumble into the dust and be gone. They'll be remembered eternally for the permanent building of character, family, enduring friendships and community bonding. That kind of building will live forever and house their immortal souls. Few of their kind will ever pass our way again.







## **A.L. FERREIRA**

Sanderson/Macclenny 1980

*"Once a week we'd go to what they called 'a washin' and we'd take a bar of homemade lye soap and go to the creek,"*

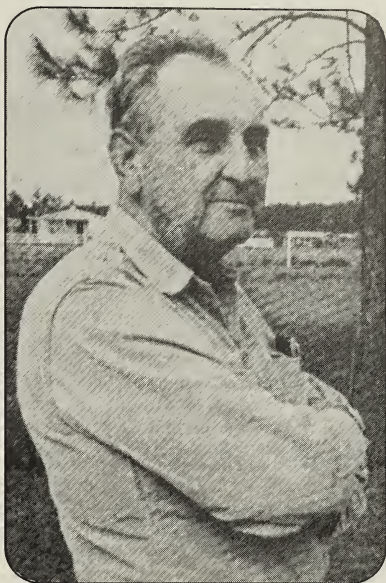
When your roots lie buried deep within Baker County soil, it doesn't matter that you were born in Fernandina and raised in Jacksonville. At least that's the way A.L. Ferreira feels about it.

"Why, my great great grandpa, Elisha Green had a farm over there on the south prong of the St. Mary's River a hundred years before I was born," he said as we talked in the comfort of his lovely Macclenny retirement home.

This tall congenial man told me he felt like he had "come home" when he retired in 1974 from the Seaboard Coastline Railroad after 38 years of service and moved to Baker County.

"I had more wonderful memories about my life that centered around Baker County than any other place," he said adding, "it was just natural I'd want to come here. About all my kin live here and its just more like home."

His fondest memories were those he spent at the Sanderson home of his maternal grandparents, William Daniel Mann and his wife, the former Jane Greene. Their daughter Ollie was his mother.



**A.L. Ferreira**

"It would take just about all day, best I remember, for us to travel from Jacksonville to Sanderson in our Model T. Ford," he said, explaining that at the time Highway 90 was yet an unpaved road.

"My grandparents lived in a large home that stood right where the new Post Office now stands in Sanderson. It had a big porch that circled the house except for one corner and tall sycamore trees shaded the lot."

He remembers well the corn cob pipe his Grandmother Jane smoked as she rocked on the big porch late in the evenings.

"When it would begin to get dark Pa would wash his feet in a foot tub, then Ma would wash her, then the oldest child right on down to the youngest would all wash their feet using the same tub and water. That's when we knew it was time to go to bed," he said.

"Once a week we'd go to what they'd call a washin' and we'd take a bar of homemade lye soap and go to the creek."

Any other kind of bath was taken in a wash tub.

"I remember seeing a wash tub in the back room of the house," he said. "I guess my grandparents used that."

He said that sometimes the wash tub was left outside in the sun to warm the water for a bath. "But us kids usually went a washin' in the creek," he said.

"I remember my Grandma making lye soap and I guarantee when you washed with that you were clean—no doubt about it.

"How I enjoyed going there," he said. "I remember many a morning waking up to the old 'pitcher' pump going and the smell of bacon frying. My uncles would all be sittin' around the old wood stove, on wooden shell boxes puttin' on their shoes. After breakfast they'd go out back to the mule lot and hitch two mules up to the wagon for the three mile ride outside of Sanderson to the farm. They'd all have lunch pails and stay all day. When they'd come home at night they'd bring back whatever was in season to eat."

He said his grandfather Dan Mann, owned a big commissary in Sanderson.

"I remember the mail was brought there, and every Saturday a container of ice cream packed in dry ice was sent out from Jacksonville by train. Joe Dobson was just a boy then, like me, and he would sell it for 5 cents a scoop. That was the best ice cream in the world," he exclaimed.

The youths in Sanderson entertained themselves by such things as sling shots and playing marbles. There was no TV in those days and very few radios.

"We'd watch the train pass through town," he said. "Many of the trains would stop to fill up with water at the water tank in front of Pa's house. Trains stopping in Sanderson or passing through after dark were lit by kerosene lamps swaying from the car ceiling. There was no air conditioning back then, we'd never heard of such luxury. I remember that during World War II the soldiers hanging out the windows dropping notes to the girls in Sanderson. "Children back then just ran around and played a lot of things like tag. I remember we'd run and play and get so hot. We'd go into the house, but there wasn't such things as soft drinks to cool you off back then. We'd open up Ma's safe and get us a bowl of clabber and a piece of cornbread. MY, my, my, that was sooooo goooooood!! There just wasn't nothing better in the world than that," he said.

"In the fall of the year my mama would hang a ball of asafetida around our necks. My it stunk! Wouldn't nobody come near you, but mama said it would keep any kind of germ or cold away from us youngins if we wore it all winter.

"Times have really changed," he said, adding, "my children would just soon have died than wear an asafetida ball hanging round their neck...but....them was the good ole days and I really enjoyed them.

"Of course," he mused, "these days you can buy asafetida pills."

He remembers well a doctor telling his mother he needed some iron.

"To this day I can see my mama pointing to this big old iron wagon wheel leaning up against the fence and instructing me to file on it some and bring her the shavings. I did and she gave

me a spoonful with a dipper of pump water. I guess I must have taken it for a week or so. Can you just imagine people doing that today?" he asked. "But we were never sick though," he added.

His grandfather (whom he calls Pa) served Baker County in the Florida House of Representatives so admirably in 1891 that he was re-elected without qualifying or seeking office.

"My, what I wouldn't give to be able to sit down and talk with my Pa and Ma today," he said. "There are so many things I'd like to ask them."

He now passes away his time fishing with his friends like his neighbor, Buck Rowe. He and old his pal Joe Dobson (the long ago ice-cream boy in Sanderson) get together every morning in a local restaurant for a cup of hot chocolate and swap news as well as stories about the good ole days in Sanderson.

He helped to organize and is active in the Baker County Historical Society.

"Gotta preserve all the past we can," he declares. "I think that's real important."

UPDATE: A.L. Ferreira passed away June 4, 1987. He is buried in Manntown Cemetery.



## George Dewey Fish

of Taylor, Baxter, and Glen St. Mary Florida ca 1980

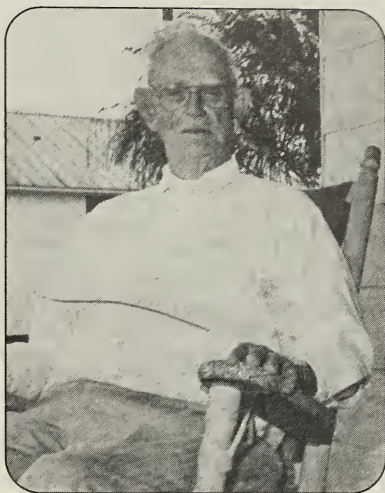
*"There was only four or five stores in Macclenny and all the streets were dirt or clay when I made my first trip to town in 1907."*

Among the first pioneer settlers in the Taylor area of Baker County were James Benjamin Fish and his wife Kizzie. During the last half of the 19th century, they sold their homestead property over in Charlton County Georgia and bought "a little place with just improvements" south of Baxter. Improvements meant buildings of some sort, such as a smoke house or barn, said their eighth son, George Dewey Fish.

"I felt like my parents were the greatest people there was," he said from his retirement home in Glen St. Mary. "My dad farmed with oxen before I was born, driving them to Jacksonville to sell produce from his garden. That was about 1880. Later on he used mules.

"Boys wore knicker pants, there were no radios, telephones, cars, ice cream or candy. If you were lucky, once a year when you made your annual trip to Macclenny you might get a piece of candy.

"There were only four or five stores in Macclenny and all the streets were dirt or clay when I made my first trip to town in 1907. My folks would buy what they needed for a year, usually denim material by the bolt for ten to fifteen cents a yard, and chambray for shirts and underwear.



**Dewey Fish**

"Our school was a one room shanty at a deserted sawmill that had been destroyed when a terrible storm hit in 1896. All us kids studied out of the same books, had the same lessons. We didn't have no report cards. When school closed, we'd mark our book where we stopped and when the next teacher came we'd show 'em where we left off. I figured I finished 'bout the sixth grade.

"We attended church once a month. Main thing I went for then was to see the other boys and girls. It was really a meeting place, to gather up and see our friends. Over the settlement it was known as North Prong, but in the minutes it's listed as Mt. Zion Primitive Baptist.

"We didn't do too much for recreation. Sometimes we'd have dances, and our parents would let us go if we so desired. I never did care much about it, it was too much fatigue in it for the little bit I did get out of it.

"Our parents taught us there was no harm in dancing if we behaved ourselves, and that's what I told my own children when they were growing up.

"After the sawmill came to Moniac we soon got a train. I had four older brothers and there was 18 years difference between me and the oldest one. It was a pretty big thing to get up enough money ahead to travel to Jacksonville, but sometimes they would. People would leave books and magazines on the train and my brothers would bring them home. My mother didn't want us reading all the things they'd bring in. Once such book she disapproved of was Peck's Bad Boy, and one I remember that was OK was Slow Train Through Arkansas."

In 1913, Benjamin Fish died, leaving Kizzie with four young children still to raise in their four-room hewed log house with a chimney made of sticks, clay and moss.

On December 19, 1918, Dewey married Lottie Rhoden, who died with pneumonia in a little less than a year, December 6, 1919.

Two years later, November 10, 1921, he married Lottie's cousin, Vertie Rhoden, and soon after moved into the old home place. The next year he bought it from the heirs. He reared his family of eight children, four boys and four girls there.

"I started in the chicken business in 1929," he said. "Disease hit the chickens and Hoover prices hit the eggs. The most you could get if you were lucky, was 10 cents a dozen."

He tried the cattle business next.

"It was just about as bad," he said. "Screwworms, cow rustling and no re-forest took its toll." (Re-forest meant if the woods were not burned off to allow new grass to grow the cattle would not prosper. Old grass would get tough and dead pine straw would cover the grass if there was no re-forest). "The cattle would go wild, so I had to get out of that business too," he said. "I grew tobacco, had my own timber and made turpentine on the approximate 660 acres."

Dewey Fish united with the Primitive Baptist faith. It was the opinion of the church, he said, that he had a special gift to preach, so he accepted, and says they "have never turned me a loose."

"A lot of churches sprung up, some went independent of the association, but I have stayed with the original by-laws and still preach the original way today," he said, explaining the particular church he pastors is a small country church over in Georgia with 16 dedicated members. They meet once a month.

As a staunch pioneer of the Taylor community, he served as a trustee in the first group of trustees for Taylor High School. He helped select the very first group of teachers in 1936. He served on the Baccalaureate Services 1944-1952, and at one time had two of his children graduate the same year. He remembers that one year a flag was draped in the chair for one son who was in the service at graduation time.

He served as the first mayor of Glen St. Mary, helping to organize it as a city, paying for the charter with five other citizens, Freddie Roberts, Claude Rhoden, Philip Taylor and Claude Dinkins. The first meeting was held in his Glen St. Mary home.

One of his sons, Morris, was the first deputy sheriff to be killed in the line of duty in Baker County. He was 36 years old.

"I was taking inventory the other day and I could only count about five of us that are still living from my generation...I don't see well or hear well anymore myself. I've spent all my life right here

in Baker County," he said, "and if there was ever a better place to go I'd have tried to go there. But there was never a better place."

Footnote: Dewey Fish and his wife Verdie are buried in North Prong Cemetery north of Sanderson.



## **MOLLIE WILSON:**

Macclenny 1979

*"My Mama knew how old I was but she's dead. My first husband knows how old I am but I don't know where he is. I sure wish I knew how old I was."*

Mollie Wilson has lived in Baker County for more than 50, yet has never set eyes on it.

"I just knows what I hear," said Mollie, as she sat in the home of her friend of forty years, Marguerite James. "I ain't ever seen her face either," said Mollie "yet I goes just about every where I go with her."

Mollie Wilson became blind when her youngest son was one month and three weeks old. He is now 51.

"I seen my babies, I know what they looks like," said Mollie, who has forgotten how old she is, "but I ain't never seen my grandchildren. I don't know what they look like."

"My mama knew how old I was, but she's dead. My first husband knows how old I am, but I don't know where he is. I sure wish I knew how old I was," she said wistfully.

Not sure of the exact year she arrived in Baker County, she is sure she and her husband and their two small sons lived in Croff's Quarters at first in a two room wooden shack. Her husband, Joe Wilson, worked in the turpentine business for 50 cents a day.

"I did my own cooking, washing and ironing," said Mollie.

As a little girl, Mollie, who thinks she was born in Savannah, Ga., grew up in Yemassee, S.C., where she went to school. She was raised by her maternal grandmother.



**Mollie Wilson**

"I never seen my daddy. I don't know nothing 'bout him," she explained, "but when my grandpa died, my mama come and got me and took me to Reynoldsville, near Bainbridge, Ga. That's where I lived when I got married," she said.

After her second marriage to Joe Wilson, they moved to Newton, Ga., where he was working turpentine for P.L. Morris of Macclenny. They started their family. Her first son Tommy was born in 1927. A year later Joe Jr. was born.

"I went to sleep one day on my front porch. When I woke up one of my eyes was burning. I just went to the doctor in Bainbridge. They wanted to take one of my eyes out sayin' it was dead. I wouldn't let them, so's my husband, he took me to another doctor in Albany.

"I asked 'em if theys could save one of my eyes 'cause I'se got to raise my children, but he says he wanted to take out the dead eye too, saying the other eye might die. So I just let them stay in my head and die side by side. I didn't want no hole in my face. They died a year apart. Doctors say it was "eyeritus."

A year or so later, Mollie's not sure exactly when, they moved to Baker County.

"My babies were just sucking babies. As they grew I kept them at home and played with them. When theys got big enough to find their way home I'd let them go 'round in the neighborhood to play," she said. "I'd tell 'um what times to come home and theys would.

"After my boys got up big I wents to work at the Morris House and Hotel Annie washing dishes, but one day a state man come in there to eat. He heard me in the kitchen just singin' away lik' I always do. He came back there to see me and sees I'm blind, and he said I couldn't work no more.

After that Mollie took in washing and ironing.

"Some of these white folks here, they loved for me to iron for them," she said with a big smile. "I'd catch rain water in lard tubs and a barrel. I had a big wash pot in my yard and the little children would throw trash on it for me. I never got burned once.

"Sometimes in the heat of summer I'd iron out on the porch. I'd build a fire outdoors, and put the coals in a bucket to keep my flat irons hot."

Mollie cooked on a wood stove, managing her family well, but she still went to doctor after doctor hoping one of them would come up with a miracle to restore her eyesight. None ever did.

Finally, when her sons were teenagers, Mollie was sent to Daytona Beach to a school for the blind. There she learned to create things with her hands such as crochet and rug making, was taught skills such as recognizing coins and making proper change.

"And this new style had come in with electric irons," said Mollie, "and they taught me how to use 'um too."

Then Joe died. Mollie fulfilled his wishes and accompanied his body by train to Bainbridge.

"But I'll be buried right here in Baker County," she said emphatically.

"After Joe's death, everybody pitched in to help me a little bit. Now I gets a little pension from the blind, but it ain't enough. I've been in the hospital three times."

Mollie's pride and joy is a granddaughter she raised from an infant, her two sons and four additional grandchildren.

Though she lives alone and manages fine, she counts friends her greatest blessing.

"Theys takes me everywhere I wants to go, fishing, shopping and trips out of town," she added.

"I can't see, but I can hear things," she added.

"Have you ever seen the Ocean?" I asked her.

"No mam, I never did see the Ocean. Oh, I wents one time down there to Ocean Pond, but I never got in the water except to the top of my feet.

"But I sure wish I knew how old I was, yes sir'ee, more than anything, I jest wish I knew how old I was."





## MAMIE MAE BURNSED RODGERS:

Sanderson 1979

*"I was out in the backyard dressing a chicken when a young neighbor boy came to the fence and asked me if I'd heard about a baby that had been abandoned in Olustee."*

Mamie Mae Burnsed has lived on the main street of Sanderson most of her life, watching people come and go as well as the years that have changed them.

"People used to stop and talk; now everyone's in such a hurry," she said from her home located on the main thoroughfare. The concrete block building houses the town's post office and at one time the town's barber shop. On Mamie's portion hang beau-

tiful lush green ferns and an abundant array of flourishing green and variegated plants. She has what most people describe as a "green thumb." Light green rocking chairs sway in the gentle breeze as we look out her front window. She can see up and down Main Street easily and keep up with those who come and go.

And so can Polly, her ancient green and yellow colorful parrot.

"I have no idea how old Polly is," she said, "but Ma owned her before me. She's a part of the family."

And Polly talks just about as good as anyone. "Polly wants a cracker, Polly wants a cracker," is something Sanderson residents



**Mamie Burnsed Rodgers  
with Uncle Tom Fraser Sanderson**

can hear repeated over and over as they walk by. Everyone knows and likes Polly. She is part of the Sanderson scenery.

Inside her cozy little building, turned home, she has collectibles everywhere. Her mother's old china cabinet holds beautiful handpainted plates.

"When I'm gone I want these to go to my cousins," she said. Her cousins live in seeing eye distance from her front and back door. They are the Dobson sisters: Mattie Roberts, Eunice Burnett, Gertrude Bevis, and Edith Keller. Down the road is cousin Ben Cobb. And there are others who live away, but these are close by. "See, I have their names on the back so they'll know which I want them to have," she said, handling them with great care. "Most of these were Ma's and Grandma's dishes."

She has her mother Emily Katherine (Em) Fraser Burnsed's feather bed and feather pillows. The bed is adorned with a beautiful hand-embroidered bedspread. "I did this myself," she said proudly. Opening a closet she exposes her maternal grandmother Maranda Bowyer's neat and perfectly stitched "log cabin" quilt. An old family Edison victrola graces the room and she opens up the cabinet. "There's ole records like 'Turkey in the Straw' and 'Shall We Gather At The River'," she noted.

She gently fondled what-nots kept safely in a glass cabinet.

"These were Ma's and Grandma's," she said reverently.

"Sanderson used to be especially busy on Saturdays," she continued as she sat down in her big easy chair. On the table nearby was a well-worn Bible. "Most folks had to walk to town for their weekly groceries or mail," she said. "Some had horse and wagons. It was an all day affair with most families. Everyone was so glad to visit and catch up on the news. Now they just drive up in their cars, rush in for their groceries or mail and drive right off, always in a rush. Use to they'd linger for awhile, maybe even sit a spell."

Mamie was born to Baker County natives, Emily Fraser and George Washington Burnsed on September 17, 1899. They were living in Bradford County at the time.

"My dad was working there at a saw mill," she said. "We were poor but we didn't suffer. We had the things we needed."

Living in what she termed a shackey house, heated by a fireplace with an old wood cook stove, the family decided to move to Green Cove Springs for a better job opportunity.

"My dad sold our horse and wagon and rented a double wide wagon and mule team to move our things to Green Cove," she said. "My mama ran a boarding house and that's where I met "Shorty" (Eliud Clair Rodgers) who was a saw mill man from South Carolina."

Mamie and Shorty were married June 21, 1916, in Green Cove Springs. Their little girl, Emma Lucile, was born there in 1919.

"After about a year I noticed "Ceil" wasn't developing properly," said Mamie. Both she and Shorty were crushed when they found out their infant daughter would never grow into a normal child or adult. Eventually they moved to Baker County, joining her parents who had returned and gone into the grocery business. The sandy road through Sanderson, known as Highway 90, was being paved all the way to Jacksonville and Shorty took a job helping to complete the work. At the same time construction of the Sanderson overpass and the new brick school house was underway. The year was 1925.

"Ceil died with pneumonia a year later at the age of seven," related Mamie. "She never walked. I took the best care possible of her and we loved her very much. She was a beautiful child, just look at her picture," she said pointing to a photograph hanging on a nearby wall.

"I didn't want another child, at least for awhile," she said, "because I wanted to keep Ceil's memory longer, but one day, a few years later, I was out in the backyard dressing a chicken and a young neighbor boy came to the fence and asked me if I'd heard about a baby that had been abandoned in Olustee.

"I hadn't heard about it, but I went and told Shorty," she said. "Later Shorty heard that Sheriff Joe Jones had stopped at a grocery down the street with the little baby on his way to Macclenny. Shorty went down to find out more information and fell in love with the little red-headed fellow. He asked the sheriff if he'd stop by our place and 'show the baby to Mamie.'"



"Well my Ma was there too, and she was beggin' us to take him. He was a cute baby. Must have been mighty poor people who left him. He had a pillow slip for a diaper, a bottle of milk and an old piece of army blanket wrapped around him.

"He had been left on a deserted store front; and luckily someone heard him cryin' 'cause at that time there was no such thing as fence laws and hogs were roaming all around. What if one had got the poor little thing?" she said, emotion rising in her soft and gentle voice.

Continuing, she explained that the sheriff informed them the judge would have to rule on the case and make his decision, but he'd let them know.

"Shorty didn't sleep much that night for thinking about wanting that baby," she said. "The next morning (Sunday) he got up and drove over to Macclenny, taking a little pillow with him to lay the baby on. The sheriff still said he'd have to wait until the next day (Monday) when the judge could rule on it, so Shorty had to come home without him.

"Early Monday morning the sheriff's wife, Alma Jones, brought him to us.

"Oh, I'm so proud I took him," she said. "He was the best little boy and we all loved him so."

They called their chubby little red-headed son Sonny.

By this time, Shorty and Mamie had taken over her parents' general grocery store, and times were some better.

"Back then I purchased staples such as sugar, rice, grits, etc., in 100-pound sacks and emptied it in huge bins or cans. Nothing was prepackaged then like it is now. We just weighed out the amount customers wanted and put it in a bag.

"Sugar and rice sold for five cents a pound and bacon for eight cents. You could buy good steak for 20 cents a pound," she said. "I sold cheese for 20 cents a pound, eggs 10 cents a dozen and fresh milk was 10 cents a quart. I bottled it myself. Butter-milk was 5 cents a quart," she continued. "We had no refrigeration back in those days like we have today but we used a carbide refrigerator that kept it cool.



"People ate mighty common food back then like dried beans, grits and meal. Most people had their own gardens, but I sold produce like lettuce and fruit such as bananas. It was delivered to us on trucks from Jacksonville.

"People coming to town to buy groceries stayed all day and usually bought a 5 cent cold drink and a nickel pack of crackers with maybe a slice of cheese cut from the old cheese block for lunch," she said. "They could eat what they wanted for 15 or 20 cents."

Shorty died in 1946 and Mamie worked the next 16 years with the Sanderson school lunch program, raising Sonny as a widow.

In 1972, at the age of 41, Sonny died with a heart attack.

"Some people say Sanderson don't grow none, but it does," she said. "There are houses all over the woods out there. The people here are mighty good to me. They know I never leave unless I go to the doctor and they drop in occasionally to say 'Hello' and to see how I feel.

"I know most it won't be long before I have to leave Sanderson and go to the nursing home," she said wistfully as we talked. "I don't want to go. I wouldn't really mind as much except that I dread to move away from my little home and Sanderson where all my memories are."

UPDATE:

Mamie lived her last days in Wells Nursing Facility in Macclenny. I visited her often and would find her sitting in her favorite easy chair brought from her home. Her other treasured belongings were distributed by her brother, Otis Burnsed. However, none of the cherished dishes were left with her cousins as she wished. Instead Otis sold off her esteemed family heirlooms to the highest bidder. She had previously asked me to take several of the things she wanted preserved in the family, so I purchased them from Otis during distribution of her things. I still considered them a gift from Mamie. The Edison victrola is a possession of mine and some of the records as well as her mother's china cabinet. I purchased her iron bed with the feather mattress and have put it on indefinite

loan in the Baker County Historical Society Museum. I bought her sewing machine as well. Her nephew, George Burnsed, confiscated the beautifully embroidered bedspread that she so meticulous fashioned and gave it to me. Although she was my distant cousin I felt very close to this gentle and kind lady and treasure the many mementos she gave to me that belonged to our common forebears during our relationship. Polly was taken by a niece who told her that someone stolen her. According to Otis's son, George, the treasured handpainted dishes were sold by his father to a garage sale dealer. Family letters and correspondence kept by Mamie for decades in a small wood chest were lost or thrown away as was many other things she had kept. Mamie died March 10, 1986, while still a resident of Wells Nursing Home. She was preceded in death by a brother Bill on Nov. 21, 1957. Otis died after Mamie and all are buried in the family plot in Manntown Cemetery south of Glen St. Mary.

# LAWTON AND ESSIE (Williams) CONNER

TAYLOR 1979

*"After the wedding we drove the mule and wagon back to my parent's house where we stayed and the next morning I got up and went to plowing,"*

**Lawton Conner**

*"Fifteen dollars would last us three or four months,"*  
**Essie Conner**

Eighty-year-old Lawton Conner stood in the middle of his three-acre garden, his face barely visible beneath the wide brim hat that offered protection from the bright noon day sun. Tender shoots of corn he neatly planted weeks before waved in the breeze and the sharp edge of his hoe sniped away at the unsolicited voluntary growth.

"You Lawton Conner?" I asked as I started out across the rows of corn, my sandals sinking down in the hot soft soil.

"Yes ma'am I am," he said, peering from under the noticeably patched up wide brim straw hat.

A quick introduction and we started for the house where Essie, his companion of 63 years, met us with hospitable greetings.

"Our house burned completely up 11 years ago," he explained as I sat in their modern trailer home. "Saved this rocker," he said, "That's all."

"We built our house out of good heart yellow pine lumber and when it went, it went fast," he said, further explaining a brick



**Essie and Lawton Conner**

was apparently loose in the flue of the fireplace on the cold wintry night in February when the disaster occurred. "We'd lived in that house about 48 years."

Both Lawton and Essie Conner were born and reared in the Taylor community. In the distance, we could see two cribs and a barn built by Lawton's father, Henry, who farmed the rich fertile soil over a century ago with his father Willis Conner, a settler who moved in from Charlton County, Georgia.

Essie's parents, Jamie Rhoden and Lettie Williams, lived in the Kyler section, down the road a bit.

"I was about 12 years old when I first saw him (Lawton)", said Essie. "He rode a big ole mule to our singing school. I bet it weighed 1,000 pounds. He tried to get me to go with him but I told him my daddy said I was too young, so he left me alone."

"She took my eye," Lawton expressed with a grin, explaining he expected her daddy's judgement. "We weren't scared of him, but we knew to mind him."

Lawton was 15 at the time. "Two years later her father gave permission to her to have fellers so I asked her again," he said.

In six months, they were talking marriage. She was 14, he was 16. The tradition was to ask permission of the girl's father so Lawton and Essie did just that.

"I said, 'Mr. Rhoden, me and your daughter has decided we want to get married'," he recalled, relating that Essie ran into the house to avoid the conversation.

"I wasn't scared," spoke up Essie. "I just didn't want to hear the lecture I knew we'd get." However her father called her back outside and a lecture they did get, but also permission to marry.

"That was on a Thursday," said Lawton. "On Saturday I got the license and on Sunday we were married at her parents home. About a 100 people in the community came."

"My mama made me the most beautiful wedding dress you've ever seen. Only cost a dollar to make," she said explaining that the material cost 25 cents a yard.



Lawton was the only child of Henry Conner and Etter Bennett. A sister had died at 11 months old. The young couple moved in with his parents.

"After the wedding we drove the mule and wagon back to my parent's house," said Lawton. "The next morning I got up and went to plowing."

"Me and my mother-in-law went to the garden to get turnips for dinner," said Essie. "She put lots of hock bones and the turnips in a huge iron pot (still in the family today) and cooked them in the fireplace."

"I told 'em he married me just to have someone to play with," said Essie. "We weren't nothing but kids. I could hold him down real good. One day we were pickin' cotton near the road and got to playing. I was holding him down and he was just a laughing. We heard someone coming in their horse and wagon on their way to Macclenny and Lawton said, 'Get up, they'll think we're fightin'. But we always got along real good together. Never been separated but a very few times."

Life on the farm wasn't easy, explained the Conners, "but I believe people were lots happier back then," he said, adding there is too much to think about today. "Everybody had to pick cotton and hoe back then. We didn't have time to go to school even. We went just long enough to learn how to read and write," he said.

"I was just an old broke farm boy when we married," he said.

"But his daddy went to sharing with us right away," said Essie enthusiastically. "We helped him farm. If he sold eggs, we'd get half the money. We weren't use to having much. Sometimes his daddy would give him 25 cents if they went to town and he'd buy me a pack of gum."

"Daddy paid 50 cents a day for hired hands and they had to be good for him to pay that," said Lawton.

Two years after marriage they moved out on their own.

"Sometimes I'd work on the county roads. We'd shovel dirt from sun up to sun down for a dollar, but back then a dollar would buy something...that much money would go a long way."

"Like what?" I quizzed.

"Oh Lord honey, you could get a, let me see, you could buy a 25 pound sack of flour for fifty cents," he said having to think hard as his mind raced back in time past today's inflation. "A good blue serge suit of clothes wouldn't cost but \$15 then. Nowadays it's \$200.

Saving up \$15 wasn't easy, he said, but it could be done.

"How?" I asked.

"Well, I'd hitch up my mule and wagon and drive through the night to Jacksonville with sweet potatoes, chickens and eggs," he said explaining he could buy chickens for 25 cents and sell them in Jacksonville for 50 cents.

"I'd be there by morning and drive around peddling all day. That night I'd head to the big warehouse and mule lot to rest up to drive back to Taylor.

"There weren't no truck deliveries back then," he explained, "just mule and wagons. I'd take care of my mule and leave him in the mule lot to rest while I slept on the warehouse platform. Next day we'd go home.

"That \$15 would last us three or four months," spoke up Essie. "When we needed more, he'd go back with another load."

Thirteen children blessed their marriage, all born at home, the first ones delivered by midwives, the last by doctors.

"We've got 35 grandchildren and 35 great grandchildren with more on the way," beamed Essie.

"Our children said they didn't want to stay in the country so they all moved away to the city. They didn't stay too long though 'cause all but three came back and settled down right here," she said.

A total of 275 acres was divided among the children.

"Some of them drop by everyday," she said, beaming with parental pride.

"I enjoyed my home and children and I never left them one night in my life," she continued.

"We knew where they were at all times," added Lawton. "There ain't no place like Baker County. I never had a mind to ramble off anyplace."

"The kids try to get him to go to the mountains," said Essie, "but he says he knows how it looks and he ain't going."

"If you ever find a big wide brim straw hat like this, get it for me," he said, adding, "I'll pay as much as \$50 for it."

Doctors have advised him to avoid exposing his skin to the sun, thus he depends upon and treasures the thus-far irreplaceable patched up hat.

With it placed squarely back on his head, he gently carried a mess of sweet tender turnip greens freshly pulled from his garden (already washed clean) and placed them in my car. I sped off down Conner Road past the century-old barns and cribs, their function now seemingly only a picturesque view of yesterday.

But to generations of Conners, who are descendants of these noble forebears, they are a constant reminder of a priceless legacy and heritage.

UPDATE: Lawton Conner died June 24, 1988, and is buried in Taylor Cemetery. In 1993, Essie was 91 years old and living with her daughter Patsy and son-in-law Johnnie Groves in Taylor.

Their son, Fred, born on Sept. 23, 1920, died June 24, 1956. Son Marcus Gene, born on August 19, 1938, died Feb. 14, 1985. In 1993, children living are: Ruby Raulerson, born Oct 23, 1918; Suzie Marsh, born Jan 10, 1922; Virgle Conner, born Dec. 27, 1924; Frank Conner, born Nov. 28, 1926; Nettie Ruth Anderson, born March 28, 1930; Eyelyn Nipper, born June 23, 1931; Gladys Hair, born July 14, 1933; Floyd Conner, born Feb. 14, 1935; Henry Conner, born April 28, 1937; and Patsy Ann Groves, born Jan. 9, 1942.





## IDA GAINNEY:

1979 Baxter

*"We'd go to bed so cold and so hungry."*

*"Part of the time we didn't have clothes to wear. I had one dress I wore to school. I'd come home and change into a rag and wear my dress back to school the next day."*



Photo Courtesy of Florida Times-Union

**Ida Gainney**

Ida Gainney stood at her door expressionless after learning someone wanted to write about her life in Baker County. Regaining a little composure, she managed a big grin and a natural, "I'm so glad ya' came" greeting.

"Let me get my teeth in," she said as she showed me to a seat in her combined living-dining area.

"My, my, who would want to know anything about me?"

Who indeed. This humble woman has probably done as much, or more, in her day than anyone to ripen the heritage tree in Baker County. Her devotion to those who have needed her services is unexcelled. Her astounding life is exemplary under the conditions in which she lived, or some might say in which she existed.

Ida Gainey vividly remembers the painfully poor days surrounding her youth barely surviving in a family of nine children.

Wiping tears from her intensive brown eyes she talked about her life.

"I watched my mama a lot when I'se a little girl," she reminisced from her Baxter home in northern Baker County. "She prayed a lot. There was an ole stump she'd go to, or down by the creek, or in her room. I 'member she was a good mama, she endured, she never left us children until God took her."

Mama was Laura Mizell who married Danel Raulerson, a blacksmith and reared their family "up from Moniac," a rural Georgia Community near the Baker County state boundary line.

"We missed school a lot," said Mis' Ida as she is fondly known throughout the community. "We'd go to school totin' our lunch pails with no shoes on. We poor children starved lots of times. We'd come in from school and might find a cold biscuit and a piece of onion, and go straight to the cotton patch to work.

"Lots of times we'd go to bed so cold and so hungry. Sometimes we'd cover up with the feather mattress, take feed sacks and stuff them with corn shucks or moss to sleep on," she said.

"Part of the time we didn't have clothes to wear. I had one dress I wore to school. I'd come home and change into a rag and wear my dress back to school the next day.

"I only went to the fifth grade, but I'm grateful 'cause I learned to read."

Miss Ida reached for her "little black memory book" as she tried to remember special dates.

"My mama died the year I got saved," she said turning the pages of the worn little black book.

"Here it 'tis! It was 1933," she squealed excitedly.

In 1924, at the age of 15, she had met and married Odus Gainey.

"Odus loved me, but, well I guess I should be 'shamed to say this, but I had another feller lik'in me too. So Odus bought my sister a pair of shoes so she could dance with him and make me jealous. I didn't lik' that much. The next day he was at church with another girl, so I sat right down and wrote him a letter. In it I said, Odus, you shore did hit my heart yes'ta'day, and I didn't know I loved you so.

"I got a reply right back and he said he'd never do that no more.

"It weren't long before I'd had a mind to marry up with him. My daddy heard we was plan'in to run away. He told me if'in I ran away, I'd git back faster than I went, so in about a month or two we got married, and moved to Baxter."

Hardships didn't improve with marriage. In fact the \$1.25 Odus made a week working as a section laborer with the Southern Railway wasn't enough to cover their expenses. More times than not, all they had to eat for breakfast was greens.

Ida found herself expecting their first child. In her seventh month of pregnancy while fishing down by the creek she slipped and fell backward while pulling on a fish line. The baby never moved again after that. Two weeks later she lost a baby girl.

In 1926, her only child, Mildred, was born.

"Peoples' always asked me why I ain't ever had more children," she said. "It was after I had grandchildren that I learned the reason myself," explaining that once, when Mildred was a baby she was hospitalized for an infection. During this time, her husband told the doctor he felt one child was enough, and told the doctor to do somethin'.

"Now I have never felt that was fair, but Odus had raised his Pa's bunch and I guess he figured he'd had enough children to raise. Sides that, times were hard."

These circumstances were contributing factors to a very important part of her life.

"I developed a genuine love and concern for people and their children," the kindly woman said relating how she'd go stay with expectant friends and neighbors until the doctor arrived to deliver their baby.

"The doctors use 'ta tell me to pay attention so I could learn to do it by myself."

One such family had 18 children so Mis'Ida got lots of practice.

"Sometimes the doctor never got there and I'd have to deliver the baby myself," she said.

"Back in them days there weren't no telephones to fetch a doctor with, so somebody would have to crank up the railroad motor car and go into St. George, 12 miles away, for the doctor.

"Sometimes he got there in time, sometimes he didn't," she said.

"Why them women didn't have nothing for pain and most times I'd have to wrap their babies up in an old rag, anything, sometimes it'd be an old skirt or worn out coat.

"Why sometimes there weren't even a sheet on the bed and I'd pull out one of my clean white towels to lay a head on and the cinches would jump on it like flies.

"We used homemade octagon soap back then and any old twine we had to tie a cord."

"The county nurse finally suggested that she become a registered county midwife.

"It was in April 1944 when she first applied for a license. Soon she was equipped with a black bag that contained all her midwifery supplies and an official-looking white uniform.

"I made a pretty nurse, I really did, and people started calling me that," she chuckled with obvious pride.

"Mis' Ida, the times Come!!" was a familiar voice any time of the night or day as her services were needed more and more.

"I got paid \$20 a baby, regardless how long I stayed in the home," she explained.

"The price was never 'upped.' It was the same when I retired 40 years later," she said with a very pleased look.



Noting the mighty poor conditions for berthing babies back then she noted with pride that she had never lost a baby during birth.

There are countless experiences she holds almost sacred. She has them recorded in her "little black book." She slowly got up from her rocker to get the original little black bag that accompanied her each time she was "fetched" to go on a house call. Reaching inside the dilapidated and fatigued bag she pulled out her record book of births.

"A lady came by not so long ago and wanted to know when she was born. Seems they couldn't find a record of it at the State Board of Health. I had it right in my book. Guess the state lost their copy," she said thoughtfully.

Soon after becoming a midwife, husband Odus died.

"He had to retire cause of diabetics, " she recalled. "He only drew \$56 a month retirement from the railroad. It weren't enough money to buy sugar pills and he died..Just up and went out yonder the shade tree," she said pointing toward the front yard. "He sat down in a chair, went into a coma, and was gone. He wouldn't take no shots, he refused any help from the county nurse, so he died."

"Changing the subject abruptly she said with a chuckle, "I delivered a baby girl one Easter day and they named her Ida Easter."

"Thing about some of these people they'd wait too late to git a doctor, or git to the hospital," she said shaking her head in dismay.

"I 'member once, after I retired, I was sittin' here a quilt'in (pointing to a quilting frame attached to her ceiling) and a man came driving up in a rickety old cross tie truck screaming 'Mis Ida you gotta come, she's done had the baby.' I told him I wasn't licensed no more and I'd git in trouble, but he kept pleadin' and pleadin'. Finally I said, OK, lets go and when we got there to his house I found his wife on her back in the yard with the baby on her belly fightin' off hogs from eatin' her baby. That's where he'd left her to git me 'cause the baby came before he could git her

to the hospital. He was full of liquor, plumb drunk, and his wife in that condition. Poor woman.

"Later, I went to the doctors office to talk to 'um 'bout it and they said not to worry 'cause I saved her life."

Midwives were forbidden to prescribe any kind of treatment, she explained.

"I waited all day once in freezin' cold weather on a delivery," she said, "but nothing happened. Someone said, 'Mis' Ida you care if'en we gives her some liquor?' I told 'em I couldn't tell 'em nothing. Then they said, 'Well how 'bout if we fix her some low bush merkel tea?' I said I can't tell you nothing to do. It got supper time and they fixed some cornbread and peas. Finally I told 'em I was going home and I got up to leave. It scared that poor girl 'cause I was leav'in I heard her screaming, 'Run here nurse, run here, it's a comin', it's a comin'. And sure 'nuf it was."

Times were hard back then she said and remembered one time she was invited to eat a meal after delivering a baby and being there all day. All that was on the table was a smoke house bone and cornbread.

Ida Gainey's not the least bit bitter. She is not even disillusioned. In fact, she is grateful "for what the Lord has done for me" beginning with her daughter Mildred, her six grandchildren and six (presently) great grandchildren.

Life centers around her family and the Baxter Church of God.

"I'm the mother of that church," she said proudly. "I stood at the door and fought the devil for that church.

"Before you leave, let me show you what the Lord's give me," she said rising from her rocker and seating herself at the upright piano. As her fingers scaled the keys in perfect gospel tones, her voice rising above the worldly cares outside her door, eyes closed, as if in vision...the words were sung with feeling and conviction, "I have Jesus, now I have everything."

FOOTNOTE: Ida Gainey was a resident of Wells Nursing Home the last few years of her life and died in 1992.

## EDGAR LEWIS:

Macclenny 1979

*"All the children on the nursery belonged to the nursery, and they could, and did, work us anyway they wanted ."*

*"I always wanted to be a preacher man."*

In 1858, a tall lanky 14-year-old former slave, Walker Lewis, wandered into Baker County (then Columbia) looking for work. He had walked from North Carolina.

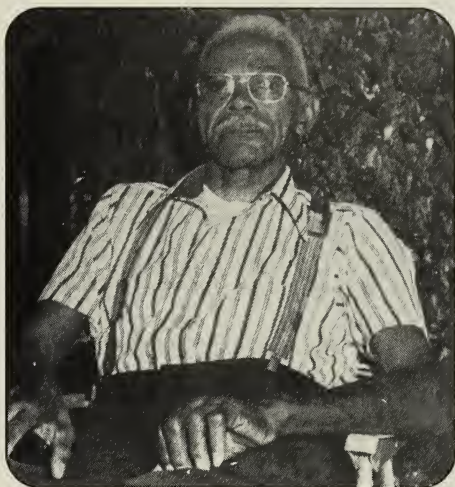
He found a job with Mr. McClenny and became a trusted livestock herder, traveling as far away as Virginia with his employer for the purchase, and walking the distance back with his herd of livestock. His

reputation in tending and caring for the animals spread and it wasn't long before he became known as the county veterinarian.

His vast experience soon caused the Griffin family, owners of a large nursery and vast amount of stock, to make Mr. McClenny an offer of exchange for the services of Walker Lewis.

So it came to be that Edgar Latin Lewis was born on Griffins Nursery April 13, 1900, one of 13 children born to Ida Nobles, his mother, and one of 21 to his father, who had been married twice before.

"My papa was hardworking and ambitious," said Edgar. "He bought him a few acres of land, and paid for it little by little until it was paid off. Because he couldn't read or write he never got



**Edgar Lewis**

a receipt, or deed, therefore he had no proof of purchase. When he couldn't prove it, he lost it."

That experience proved costly to the poor hardworking Walker Lewis, but he seemed determined to have something to call his own. He purchased two acres of land in 1897 from D.H. and Emma Rowe, complete this time with deeds and abstracts. As he could afford it, he purchased an acre at a time until he had 21 acres added to it.

Meanwhile, Walker Lewis was rearing his family on Griffins Nursery in a four-room tenant house.

"My ma would do a family's wash for 50 cents to a dollar a bundle. She boiled them in a wash pot, hard to clean working clothes, I mean, and scrubbed them on a scrub board using home-made lye soap. Then they were ironed with flat irons," said Edgar. "Ma called it her snuff money, and that was her greatest luxury, a five-cent can of Railroad snuff.

"All the children on the nursery belonged to the nursery and they could, and did, work us anyway they wanted," he continued.

"My sister, Maynard, worked for her mistress all day for 25 cents starting when she was 10 years old. They learned her how to cook and she cooked for the family as well as boarders. There was no refrigeration and ice was brought by train once a week to Macclenny from Jacksonville. The Griffins kept the ice packed in sawdust under the house and anything needing to be kept cool was kept there," explained Edgar. "My sister didn't know what a home was from morning until night. She left there when she married at 21. She's still living today at age 95."

In 1910, the Lewis family moved on the acreage they bought. Walker Lewis, although 66 years of age, would ride his mule the two miles to Griffins Nursery, arriving by 5 a.m. each morning to harness 20 to 25 mules and horses for field riders, milk cows, feed hogs and other stock, single handed.

Adult members of the family worked in the fields for a dollar a day and 25 cents for children from "sun up till sun down," explained Edgar.



"When the noon bell would ring for lunch the smaller children would be there from home with lunches. If you lived too far away for lunch to be delivered by your family you could go to the commissary to buy cheese and crackers, but you'd end up spending your money as fast as you made it.

"Most us children left home by age 15 to make some money, ridin' the train for 50 cents into Jacksonville. Highway 90 was a dirt road then," said Edgar. "My parents never owned a car. Pa would have never thought about a car; he had a horse and buggy.

"The black people really looked forward to their churches and especially revivals when ministers would come from far off," explained Edgar. "You could hear them hollering for miles. Even when we lived on the nursery we could hear them hollering all the way there.

"When I was 15, I was saved and since then I haven't changed. I always wanted to be a preacher man. Men, black and white, used to put me on a barrel and give me a penny to preach. All I could holler was 'I want to be a preacherman, I want to be a preacherman', over and over, and they'd laugh at me," said Edgar.

"A lot of people think I am a preacher but I'm not. It's because I always witness for Christ. My greatest joy is serving others and helping my community. The only reason I even have a car is to take others where they need to go."

Walker Lewis died in 1928 at the age of 84. Although still on the Griffin Nursery payroll, his strenuous work of yesteryear was passed on to a younger generation. In the end, though suffering from rheumatism and arthritis, he helped in the 'big' house doing odd jobs and helping to care for the aged and ailing Griffin family patriarch, Will.

After Ida's death, Edgar had their land surveyed and divided among the eleven heirs, some accepting deeds, some not, but Edgar has continued to pay the taxes, improve the property, and make it available to family members when the need arises. Today the acreage located in south west Macclenny is known as Lewis Subdivision.

Edgar Lewis will probably never forget those turn-of-the-century times when he picked wild greens from the open fields for food, gathered the leftover dried peas and corn from the deserted fields and storing it away in croaker sacks to be used for food in the winter; but his heart swells with pride when he looks back on his family and the eternal legacy he has inherited from such noble and industrious people who helped mold Baker County into its beginning.

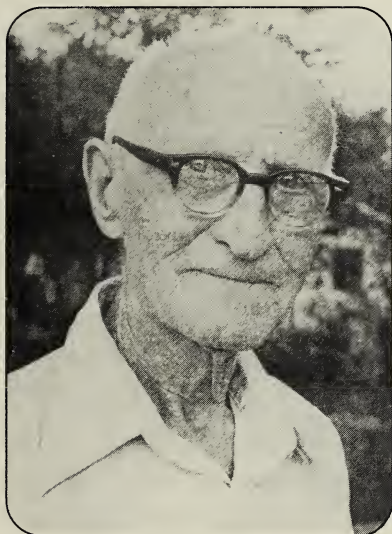
He is buried in Mount Herman Cemetery south of Macclenny.

## DR. JOHN HOLT:

MACCLENNY 1979

*"I think I've traveled in almost every civilized country on the globe and I found the nicest people in the world right here in Baker County."*

*"I've never said I couldn't do anything. If I couldn't do it, I learned how."*



John Holt

Volumes could literally be written about the illustrious, fruitful and productive life of multi-talented John Holt, doctor of Psychology, Ordained Methodist Minister of the Gospel, educator, author, composer, pianist, organist, missionary, artist and poet to name a few.

"I'll tell you why I think I do so many things," the accomplished 86-year-old spritely achiever said. "I used to offer my students as much as \$20 if they ever caught me idle. To this day if I listen to television

or music, my hands are busy," he said, pointing to an array of crocheted handiwork, most of which he designed. He also quilts and embroiders. Handing me a stack of books he has authored, he explained that one of them, entitled "Dirt Roads of Georgia" is his autobiography from age five.

"I grew up in the backwoods, greatly in the backwoods," he emphasized. "There were no cars, no roads, no nothing. My dad was a Naval Store Prospector, and traveled around buying up run-down or abandoned turpentine establishments, building them up and reselling for profit. I was taken out of school a lot. My dad

just took me to school each time we moved and said to the teacher, "I don't know what grade he belongs, just put him where you think he should be. I was eight or nine before I got out of the first grade.

"Of course," he continued, "Since I left home, my personal way of life has led me to 54 different homes. I've got a list of all of them."

At the age of 18, Doctor Holt had passed a teacher's examination and was teaching 81 students in a one room abandoned church.

"We had no desk. The students sat in the pews with their pads on their laps. I made \$210 for a year's work."

His talents as an educator were recognized immediately and offers of jobs came from far and near. He soon found himself principal of a school with 14 teachers.

"World War I was raging and it looked like Germany was going to whip us," he said, "so I enlisted in the Marines and went to France. I was promised my job would be waiting. Upon my return I found the laws had been changed and was told in order to teach I needed a bachelor's degree in education. I didn't know what it meant, nor had I ever heard of credits. I knew I had to have a job and I desperately wanted to teach, so I went to Furman College in South Carolina to apply for enrollment.

"There I was told I must have a high school education before applying to enter and there I stood with an eighth grade education. My experience didn't count, they told me.

"Finally after crying and begging, they consented to let me take an entrance exam, (which they never got around to giving). With only six weeks left of school I convinced them to let me start then so I could start learning. I ended up with the highest score in the freshman class, finishing college in three years."

Ironically, 63 years later, word of his success in the educational field reached a school he once attended in Fitzgerald, Ga., which extended an invitation of honor for him to graduate with their 1975 graduating seniors and receive a high school diploma. This he did!



Prior to 1975, he received a bachelor's degree in 1924, a master's in 1928 and doctorate in 1953.

From his first graduate job as superintendent of schools in Douglasville, Ga., a position offered to him upon graduation, he advanced to Dean of Schools at Furman, his Alma Mater. He was the first dean of Georgia State, as well as the first at the University of Tampa and Thomas Edison, helping to organize them, writing their catalogs, setting up their courses, hiring their faculties. The Georgia superintendent of schools brought other superintendents to observe his record-keeping system.

"The Depression hit and people by the thousands were roaming the country in search of work," he said. "I was asked to take the position of psychologist for the State of Florida. My office was in one of the state's many transient camps in Miami where I was personally responsible for the mental health of 1,200 people.

"After the depression, I felt I needed a long vacation. I'd never crossed the Mississippi River, so I bought a travel trailer and took a trip out west for three months. In Wyoming I stopped by the Arapaho Indian reservation. I wanted to see what they looked like. Something really struck me. I had a feeling I just had to go back and live with those Indians, and I did. One of my greatest desires since age 12 (when I joined the church) was to be a missionary. I returned to Florida, packed up my things and headed back to Wyoming and the Arapaho reservation. I mastered their language which was difficult, because you see, it's not a printed language. I stayed 16 years. While there I had very little contact with other people."

After leaving his work with the Arapahos, he traveled around Wyoming investing his time in education and his money in philanthropies such as building five churches with "my own hands and money."

"I think I've traveled in almost every civilized country on the globe and I found the nicest people in the world right here in Baker County, now that is true," he stressed emphatically. "They are the friendliest and best and make the staunchest friends. I've

got worlds of them in this county and I wouldn't take a million dollars for any one of them."

Baker County prior to this time was no stranger to him. His brother, A.P. Holt, settled here in the 40s, bringing him here many times for visits. During the 50s he left the Arapahos to be with his grieved father who had moved to Macclenny after the death of his mother. During this time he owned Macclenny's first jewelry store and wrote a weekly column entitled, "Let's Face The Facts" for The Baker County Press. His editorial type writing style focused on worldwide problems as well as state and local government affairs. County problems, such as unkept store fronts and messy window displays brought about a clean up campaign and praise from merchants and local residents alike.

Another time he was visiting in Baker County, on vacation from the Arapahos, he was persuaded by then Baker County School Superintendent Jimmy Burnsed to take the job of principal at Taylor School so it could open for the school term. He obliged.

Dr. Holt has mastered most of his feats by self mastery and determination. At the age of 8 he asked his sister to explain the lines and black symbols on her piano music. Today he plays complicated pieces by such famous composers as Beethoven, Bach – 18 to 20 pages long on the piano and organ.

Once, when he was very young, his father bought a box of books at an auction. One was a Bible written in Spanish. Before long he had learned to read it by comparing the English version with it word for word. The box of books turned out to be one of his greatest treasures, exposing him to great authors such as Shakespeare. One of the books entitled, "Happy Hearts and Homes That Make Them," he attributes influenced him more than any other one thing in his life.

Quotes, such as "You judge a person's intelligence by what he does."

"You can't buy happiness, no need to look for it because it's a creation of your own mind."

"The city of happiness is in the state of mind."

"Nobody has any right to respect you unless you respect yourself."

"You can't have friends without being friendly."

Living by philosophies such as these is perhaps the reason he never once in his life had to apply for a job. Opportunities were always extended to him.

His contributions were recognized when he was selected to appear in the 7th edition of Personalities of the South, honoring American leaders for their outstanding ability and service to the community and state.

Proof that Dr. John Holt has a swollen heart and not a swollen head occurred when a "Service to Mankind Award" arrived in the mail for him.

Feeling unworthy and unqualified to have received such an award, he said to the postmaster, "I don't believe this belongs to me, I don't know of any service I've rendered to mankind." But the postmaster assured him there was no mistake.

Still unsure and completely astonished that he should be selected for such an award the postmaster advised him to speak with the president of the club that presented the award. The Baker County Sertoma Club's president, James Smith, assured him there had been no mistake.

"I never knew there was even such a club in Baker County," he said. "I treasure and appreciate that one plaque more than any other honor I've received." And he has received countless others.

For years Dr. Holt has transcribed books for the blind, teaching himself the Braille so masterfully he was accepted as a Braille writer by the Library of Congress. His services were free, a labor of love.

"I have never said I couldn't do anything," he said. "If I couldn't do it, I learned how."

The hand-painted Holt Coat of Arms, which hangs proudly to the right of his entrance door reads, "Exaltavit Humilies" meaning, "He exalts and helps humble people."

Quite appropriate for Dr. John Holt.

"I'm writing a book now," he said, as we were winding up our conversation. "You've heard of Death With Dignity? Well my book is "Growing Old With Dignity." A man can walk straight and tall if he wants to."

And that, Dr. John Holt, is why you are considered 10 feet tall.

UPDATE 1993: Dr. Holt lived the remainder of his life in Macclenny until ill health forced him to live in a nursing facility in Moultrie, Ga. He often wrote his good friend and neighbor, Wilma Morris, "Oh, how I want to come home." He is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery south of Macclenny in his beloved Baker County. He had no children.



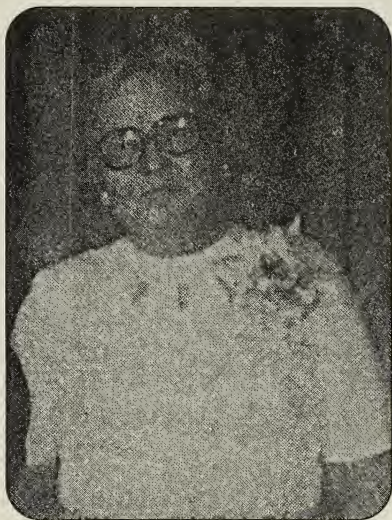
## **RAY AND ATHENA (Raulerson) BROWN**

OF TAYLOR FLORIDA 1980

*"I sold one of our chickens for a dollar once and gave the dollar to Ray and he lost it. It was the only dollar we had."*

"I have lived to actually see seven generations of my family," said Mrs. Ray (Athena Raulerson) Brown from her home in Taylor.

"I can vividly remember being in church with my great grandma, my grandma, my mama and myself, all sittin' on the same bench one Saturday morning just waitin' for church to start. That's how far ahead of time we'd get there, traveling from way up here in a horse and wagon. Now we can't get to church on time traveling in an automobile," she said.



**Athena Brown**

"One Saturday night recently when we were down to the church at a singing, I was sittin' there thinking about all these things and how church used to be there and I thought, you know, there's still four generations that could set on that row now, but I would be sittin' where great grandma was sittin' (of course all these others have gone on) but I would be sittin' where great grandmother was sittin'.

"We would have the biggest time when we were kids comin' home on Sunday afternoon from church. We'd be spent the weekend up there and we'd have the best time hopping in and out of the wagon as it went along."

Athena was born at Taylor, the daughter of Alonzo (Lon) Raulerson and the former Katie Fish. She has lived there all of her life. Her grandfather, William Raulerson, and his wife America Dinkins had a saw mill operated by a steam boiler, "and it was used for everything," she said. "After Granddaddy Raulerson died my daddy used to work over there for Grandma. People from Sanderson used to bring their rice there for my daddy to clean. People brought their corn to be ground. My daddy would measure it and keep a dole for payment, because most people didn't have money to pay cash back then."

Athena was attending school in Sanderson, living with her uncle Arthur Raulerson, while away from her home in Taylor. On her 16th birthday she eloped with one of her classmates, Ray Brown, the son of George Colquit Brown and Minnie Taylor.

"I finished putting her through school and college," said Ray, who had known Athena all her life. "A friend of ours, Frank Mixon, made the arrangements for us over in Lake City, and it was 10 p.m. before we actually were able to be married."

"My daddy was really strict," said Athena. "He'd have had a fit if he had known. When we got back to Baker County we set up most of the night partying at Ray's aunt, Courtney Comb's house with some of my cousins and friends. Ray was living with his first cousin, George Raulerson and his wife Alma, helping them to farm. So very early in the wee morning hours we went there and that's where we stayed until we got a little house of our own."

"Her daddy was working out in the field when we went back over to get her clothes," said Ray. "Somebody had done told him we'd run away and got married. When he'd get aggravated he'd always pull his nose. He come up to the house and was standing on the front steps pulling his nose. I'll never forget his words," smiled Ray, who quoted him as saying, "Now I guess you kids have played hell."

"Then," said Ray, "he sat down and started talking with us as if nothing had ever happened."

Ray farmed and worked in turpentine to support Athena and his children, peddling produce around turpentine camps and even hoeing peanuts all day for 50 cents.

"We married during the hardest times imaginable," said Ray, "during the Depression."

"I sold one of our chickens for a dollar once," said Athena, "and gave the dollar to Ray and he lost it. It was the only dollar we had."

As the children started to school, Athena decided she wanted to finish her education.

"When the children caught the school bus every morning, she did too," said Ray proudly.

"And Ray kept the younger children with him so I could," she said. "They went everywhere he did. Our little boy could drive the mule and dip wagon, so he and his sister decided one day while their daddy was dipping that they'd get in the gum barrel. There was a little sheet of raw gum in the bottom and their little feet got stuck in the gum barrel. Everytime they'd touch the side of the barrel it'd get all over 'em. Their hair stuck to the walls of the barrel and their little hands too. They were in a mess."

"How did you get it off?" I quizzed.

"Well, after he got them unstuck from the barrel, they started walking in the sand and you know, that gum picked up every grain of sand that touched it. There was a coat on their feet that night as thick as was in that gum barrel. I did have to take a knife and scrape off all I could and we used turpentine and kerosene to help get the rest off."

"When our oldest child was in the ninth grade, I graduated from Taylor High School," she said.

The year was 1945 when she went to work for the Baker County School System. Her employment lasted 28 years. Meanwhile, Ray went to work for the Forestry Service and served 20 years before retirement.

Five of their eight children received degrees from college. The other three attended.

Athena attended summer school in Gainesville for several summers to continue her education and eventually graduated from Lake City Junior College with a bachelor's degree.

In 1940, Ray bought a 67-acre farm on time from Athena's uncle. It was property that had been in the family for several generations. He paid \$50 down and \$100 a year payment until it was theirs.

Time may have marched forward, taking with it the preceding generations, but for Athena and Ray Brown it left behind the memories, and for them, that's what counts the most.

FOOTNOTE '93: Ray Brown died June 23, 1986. Athena died February 11, 1992. Both are buried in North Prong Cemetery north of Sanderson.



## LACY RICHARDSON:

Sanderson ca 1980

*"The worse thing was going to buy groceries on a \$2.50 paycheck."*

Except for a paved road and modern automobile you could almost imagine yourself back in the past, say about 50 years ago, when you drive out State Road 229 about three miles south of Sanderson to visit Lacy richardson.

A two-rutted land, flanked on either side with tall stately cedar trees, leads you up to the log and weather-boarded 19th century home place. A freshly swept dirt yard, free from even one blade of grass, with neatly arranged flower beds scattered about, is a picture book setting that adds to the nostalgic scene from days past.

The old outdoor privy (toilet) to the right of the back yard leans dejectedly to one side, and the century old barn stands stately nearby.

Clad in overalls and denim shirt, Lacy Richardson sits in one of the comfortable rocking chairs that adorn his front porch in the cool breeze beneath the towering shade trees. To the right and left of him, within a block or two, are the modern homes of five of his eight offspring who keep the home fires burning by traditionally doing things today they were raised up traditionally doing in the past.



**Lacy Richardson**

"For instance," said his daughter Rachel Lauramore, who with her husband Marvin and daughter live a stones throw away. "We grow and raise most of our food, grind our own corn into meal and grits, and we are building a smokehouse to preserve meat 'like Daddy and mama used to."

"Lord, it was good eatin' too," chimed in her father.

Lacy Richardson was born nearby. He's not absolutely sure if it was over on the 'ole Pierce Place' or not, but he knows his great granddaddy, Elisha Greene, settled the land in 1830 where he found pure water on high ground along the South Prong of the St. Mary's River in what was then Columbia County ( Became Baker in 1861). It was here he lived until he died. He raised a family of thirteen children with his second wife, Elizabeth Driggers. (He and wife number one, Elizabeth's cousin, Elizabeth Wilkinson, had six children).

The eleventh child born to them, Andred Jackson Greene, was Lacy's grandfather. Andred's marriage to Mary Jones produced fifteen offspring; the sixth child, born 1891, Sadie Lovania, was Lacy's mother.

Sadie married Ellis Stephens Richardson January 23, 1907. Their first child, Lacy, was born in December of that same year.

"I was raised on Griffin's Nursery where my father was employed," said Lacy. "There wasn't too much to do as I grew up back then. You couldn't call yourself datin' 'cause they wern't no money or cars to do nothing. You'd just meet up with the girls and talk a little. Usually at church."

After graduating from the eighth grade at seventeen years of age, he took a test to become a teacher and passed. Instead though, he went to work for the state as a rodman, helping a road surveyor. He returned to Baker County in 1928 and became employed again by the nursery and met Emma McDonald.

"The way that come around, we was both working at the nursery," he said. "I asked her daddy for permission to marry her and he said he wouldn't give her away, so I told him I'd take her anyway. He didn't say nothing and I didn't say anymore."

Three weeks later, with his dad Ellis's car, and ten dollars in his pocket, he headed out toward the McDonald home.

"When I got there for Emma, her dad got in the car and went to Macclenny with us to get married," he said. The year was 1930.

"My parents had a big ole house and we moved in with them."

"The bottom fell out that year! The Depression had begun. I worked six days a week at the nursery and was asked to give one of those days in free labor back to the nursery. The worse thing was going to buy groceries on a \$2.50 paycheck," he said shaking his head as if in disbelief.

"I done it for awhile, until it looked like we were going to starve, then I moved into a little house on my daddy's place to help him with the farming while he stayed on at the nursery. Our first two children, Wilford and Joyce, were born there."

In 1934 Lacy helped his dad build a new home. In return for his time and labor Ellis Richardson gave his son his present home and about 30 acres of land. The original log home was later insulated by adding weather boards. In 1951 the home was wired for electricity and in 1965 indoor plumbing was added. Six additional children were born to the couple.

Eventually Lacy was able to do some turpentine work on his land along with farming. Later he spent thirteen years as a guard at the State Prison in Raiford.

"I had the death watch and guarded more than one before their electrocution," he said.

"Do you believe in capitol punishment?" I asked.

"They got to do something with 'em," came his reply.

"I sat in the electric chair once, but I was sure it wasn't connected up when I did it," he said.

"Prisoners are running the prisons now, " he continued. "If they don't get what they want, they riot!"

Though times have changed, and Lacy Richardson is most certainly aware of it, he isn't letting it affect him much, one way or the other.

"People 'round here use to have feuds," he said. "They'd meet up at Sanderson and kill each other once in a while. There's been less-killing in the past twenty years than ever before.



"Use to be moonshine stills were all over the county," he continued. "I was going to make me some in a wash pot one night in the smoke house and a car drove up just as I got the fire good and started. I put the fire out and went to see who it was. It was Sheriff Shannon Green. His car had broke down and he needed a flashlight. I never did try to make no more. You could buy a five gallon jug for \$4.00."

More than 100 years ago Elisha Greene was fighting wild Indians in a primeval wilderness and his wife, Elizabeth, was making her family's clothing on a loom. While their great grandson has no desire to go back to those days, he's content not to go forward either.

"I'm satisfied with things just the way they are," he said, rising from his chair, extending his tall frame to just beneath the rafters of his porch.

"See the logs?," he said, pointing proudly to one exposed beneath the timbers. This house is still the way it was when it was built and I like it just that way! The way it was!"

UPDATE: Lacy Richardson and his wife died seven days apart in 1987. Emma McDonald passed away on 7 Dec and Lacy on Dec. 19th. They are buried with many other of their family members in near-by Green's Creek Cemetery (now called South Prong) south of Sanderson. The old homeplace is lovingly cared for and preserved just as they left it by daughter Rachel and son-in-law Marvin Lauramore.

The following is a family update written by Rachel February 19, 1993.

Very few things have changed at the home where Lacy and Emma (McDonald) Riochardson lived and raised eight children. But that is how Mama and Daddy wanted it to be. They said my brothers and sisters would want to come back home and look around from time to time. And they do. I don't know how old the house is but my guess would be around 100 years old. Mama and Daddy lived in it for around 53 or 54 years.

The outdoor toilet fell a few years ago. And the big oak tree that stands in the front yard has been breaking off. It only



has a few more branches left on it now. Daddy said his Aunt Annie (Richardson) Wester planted all of those big oak trees in front of the house. So they have to be about 85 years old.

I still live on the old place with my husband Marvin and daughter Emma. We built a house next door to Mama and Daddy. My youngest sister Redith lives here too, in a mobile home next door to us.

All of my Mama's family have died, but daddy still has a brother, Andrew Richardson and a sister Elsie Clark living.

### **Rachel Richardson Lauramore**

Family genealogy:

Lacy Richardson married Emma (McDonald) Richardson July 18, 1930  
They had nine children, eight are still living in 1993.

Wilford Lacy Richardson born Jan. 8, 1932

Joyce Grace (Richardson) Griffis born May 6, 1933

Vernon Albert Richardson born Nov. 20, 1935

Harry Richardson born April 15, 1938

Infant son born and died 1940

Franklin Benny Richardson born Jan. 5, 1942

Carl Wesley Richardson born Aug. 24, 1944

Rachel (Richardson) Lauramore born Mar. 23, 1946

Redith (Richardson) Harrington born Jan. 10, 1948

They have 15 grandchildren and 20 great grandchildren

LACY RICHARDSON: born Dec. 31, 1907, died Dec. 19, 1987

Buried Mt. Zion (Swift Creek) Cemetery in Union County Fl.

His father:

ELLIS STEPHEN RICHARDSON: born Dec. 30, 1885, died Apr. 28, 1962

Buried South Prong Cemetery, Sanderson, Fl.

His mother:

SADIE (GREEN) RICHARDSON: born May 12, 1891, died Mar 28, 1977

Buried in south Prong Cemetery, Sanderson

ELLIS AND SADIE'S CHILDREN ARE:

Lecy (Richardson) (Rhoden) Kirkland: born June 23, 1909, died Feb. 9, 1991: Buried Manntown Cemetery South of Glen St. Mary

Elsie (Richardson) Clark: born June 21, 1913

Andrew E. Richardson, born Dec. 19, 1915

ELLIS STEPHEN RICHARDSON's family

Father GEORGE A. RICHARDSON born Aug. 8, 1856, died Nov. 29, 1924

Buried South Prong Cemetery

Mother MALINDA (COOK) RICHARDSON born Dec. 1, 1861, died Sept. 18, 1927

Buried South Prong Cemetery

Their children are:

George W. Richardson, born July 27, 1903, died July 7, 1958

Buried South Prong Cemetery

William (Bill) Richardson

Annie (Richardson) Wester born 1882, died 1952

Buried South Prong Cemetery

Allie Richardson (Coleman) (McDonald) born Oct 9, 1889, died Jan 25, 1974, buried South Prong Cemetery

Alice (Richardson) Roberts

Bivy Green

SADIE L. (GREENE) RICHARDSON'S FAMILY

Father: Andrew J. Greene, born Mar. 2, 1961, died Nov. 15, 1928

Buried South Prong Cemetery

Mother: Mary L. (Jones) Greene, born Oct. 17, 1866, died Nov. 16, 1939 Buried South Prong Cemetery

her paternal grandfather:

Elisha Greene, born S.C. Oct. 2, 1790, died Nov. 17, 1875

Buried South Prong Cemetery

Elisha's wife was (1) Elizabeth Wilkinson, (2) Elizabeth Ann Driggers

Greene: born June 30, 1825, died Jan. 6, 1906.

Children of Elisha and Eliz. Ann were:

Rhomie Green born 1885, Pearla (Davis) 1887, twin girls 1888, Robert 1889, Sadie Lavania (Richardson) 1891, Mallie 1893, Nettie (Alford) 1894, Effie (Stafford) 1896, Esco 1898, William M. 1900, Paul 1902, Maude (Stafford) 1905, Rowean 1908, Gressie (Wiggins) 1910, all born Baker County.

FAMILY OF

EMMA LAURA (McDonald) RICHARDSON born Olustee Sept. 18, 1912, died Dec. 7, 1987 Buried Mt. Zion Swift Creek Cemetery, Union Co.

Fl.

Emma's father was

\*William Colbert McDonald, born Nov. 11, 1880, died Nov. 6, 1961, Buried Mt. Zion (Swift Creek) Cemetery, Union Co., Fl.

Emma's mother was

Emma Laura (Coleman) McDonald, born Mar. 20, 1887, died Feb. 22, 1927, Buried Mt. Zion Cemetery, Union Co., Fl.

Emma's grandfather was:

Isaiah G. Coleman, born Sept. 25, 1854, died Jan. 28, 1918, buried Mt. Zion Cemetery in Union Co.

Emma's grandmother was:

Margret M. Coleman, Born June 16, 1855, died Oct. 16, 1936, buried Mt. Zion Cemetery Swift Creek Cemetery, Union Co.,Fl.

Emma Laura (McDonald) Richardson brothers and sisters were:

Philip McDonald, born Dec. 5, 1903, died Oct. 21, 1967, buried Mt. Zion Cemetery Union Co. Fl.

Isaiah W. McDonald, born Aug. 23, 1907, died Nov. 2, 1975, buried Memorial Cemetery, Lake City, Fl.

Charles Lawton McDonald, born July 7, 1910, died Nov. 21, 1979, buried Memorial Cemetery, Lake City, fl.

Marvin Leonard McDonald, born April 21, 1916, Died, Sept. 27, 1974, buried Bethlehem Cemetery, Lake City, Fl.

Vernon Foster McDonald, born Sept. 5, 1918, died Nov. 30, 1986, buried Mt. Zion Cemetery, Union Co. Fl.

Idell McDonald born Feb. 3, 1909, died Aug. 10, 1916, buried Elzey Chapel Cemetery, Union Co. ,Worrington Springs, Fl.

Allie May (McDonald) Godwin, born Mar 26, 1913, died Sept. 24, 1945, buried South Prong Cemetery, Sanderson

Effie M. (McDonald) Byrd, born Sept. 28, 1914, died May 16, 1977, buried Woodlawn Cemetery, south of Macclenny.

\*William Colbert McDonald had one brother that the family is aware. His name is Charles Lawton McDonald who died about 1918 and is buried in the Olustee Cemetery, Olustee Fl.

Note on William Colbert McDonald from granddaughter Rachel Richardson Lauramore.

"I don't know much about my granddaddy William Colbert McDonald except that he was a good man. He didn't talk about himself very much. He did tell his family that he and his brother Charles Lawton McDonald were adopted when they were small boys by a man and a woman named Lasaine (could be spelled wrong). But they let Lawton and William keep their family name McDonald. I don't know where they were from, but my granddaddy talked about making snow balls when he was a boy and lived in North Carolina.

Uncle Lawton was older than William about two years, and he joined the army when he was old enough. William couldn't stand to see him go off and leave him but he wasn't quite old enough to go off to the army. So he told the (them military) he was 19 years old, and they let him join. Both brothers served during the Spanish American War.

#### ISAIAH AND MARGRET COLEMAN'S CHILDREN:

Gid C. Coleman born 1894, died 1932 buried Mt. Zion Swift Creek in Union Co., Gl.

Ovey Coleman, born July 30, 1885, died Oct. 2, 1924, buried Mt. Zion Cemetery Union Co., Fl.

Russell Isaiah Coleman, born Aug. 14, 1892, March 17, 1947, Buried Mt. Zion Cemetery, Union Co., Fl.

Oni Coleman Denmark and Effie Coleman are known daughters



## ALVIN CANOVA CHACE

SANDERSON ca 1980

*"My grandmother Diana would tell electrifying stories of her childhood in Baker County like when her father Elisha Greene would fight off the Indians."*

When Alvin Chase moved to Baker County in 1970 he took up roots of a pioneer heritage that began even earlier than Baker County.

He is the great grandson of Elisha Greene who arrived with his large family in the territory now known as Baker County with the first wagon train of settlers in 1830. Elisha settled along the banks of the South Prong of the St. Mary's



**Alvin Chase**

River where he found pure water and lived in a home fashioned of palmettos until he could cut enough timber for a home.

One of Elisha's daughters, Diana, met and married George Paul Canova, originally from neighboring St. Johns County. He had become a very successful businessman in Sanderson. George and Diana's daughter, Adelene, became the mother of Alvin.

Although Adelene Canova lived with her dentist husband, William Henry Chase in Jacksonville where their son Alvin was born, many trips were made by the family to Baker County to visit relatives. Young Alvin, and his brother Henry, spent hunting seasons with their first cousins Fred and Harold Mann of Sanderson.

We traveled out to Sanderson by train," said Alvin, "because the road from Jacksonville to Sanderson was unpaved. Alvin said

he vividly remembered the cold winter mornings when all would gather around the fireplace or wood burning stove, "freezing on one side and burning up on the other," he said.

My grandmother Diana would tell electrifying stories of her childhood in Baker County like when her father Elisha Greene would fight off the Indians," he said.



**Nine sons of Dianah Canova who returned home to care for her the last six months of her life.**

**Back row: Albert, Nolan, Paul and Ed.**

**Front row: Will, Lonnie, Joe, George and Tom.**

Indians killed Elisha's foster son Daniel and another time they burned down the family home and scattered the livestock. Elisha buried (what is thought to be) the first persons buried in present day South Prong Cemetery located along the banks of what is still known today as Greene's Creek. {Elisha donated the land and the cemetery for decades was known as Greene's Creek Cemetery). Earlier in the day Elisha had befriended the Tippins family when they stopped at his farm to freshen up before continuing on their journey to Mrs. Tippin's father's home near Ocean Pond in North-

west Baker County. Military reports stated that Elisha had warned them of Indian 'sightings', but the family was in a hurry to get to Mrs. Tippins parent's home before dark. A short time later someone found the entire family scalped by the Indians. One small baby escaped death although she too had been scalped. (She lived to be in her 90s). Elisha and his neighbors fashioned a coffin from the slain family's wagon, covered their bodies with quilts and buried them beneath a shade tree. (Today the mark of the wagon's axle left in the tree is visible and a monument identifying the family has been erected near-by).

As a young man, Alvin Chase served a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ (Mormon) in South Carolina, a church and religion his grandfather, George Paul Canova, gave his life in 1898 when ambushed in Sanderson. (A professional play was written and performed in Jacksonville portraying the incident. Alvin Chace later became the first Stake President for the Church of Jesus Christ Of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon) in Florida.

Alvin married Alzada Beasley while studying for a law career that was interrupted when he was drafted into World War II. He went to Europe where he said he saw very little combat. He took advantage of many great concerts and operas. He even studied French.

When he returned from Europe he gave up studying law and instead made his career Real Estate.

Alvin and Alzada are the parents of five children. They wanted a home in the country, "not just any home" said Alzada, "but an old country home" where their children could enjoy the amenities of country living.

They said their dream came true when they were able to purchase the old Griffin nursery home built in 1895 and later owned by the late C.C. Fraser. The surrounding 21 acres are occupied by the homes of Alzada's parents, Acel and Mary Llanos Beasley originally from Duval and Columbia County and several of their children and grandchildren.

The family combines efforts to grow a spring and fall garden and raise chickens, cows and hogs.



"Sometimes I'll look out my window and see a hog hanging from a rafter," laughed Alzada. "Our son in law Billy (Billy Kerce originally from Olustee) is very resourceful and he loves to bar-becue a hog and invite our friends and neighbors over".

Six year old grandson Al Kerce made a carton of fresh butter 'all by himself' for his great grandmother Beasley, said a proud Alzada.

"Al loves doing for others just like his daddy," she said adding that her grandson has learned "just when to pick the produce and many other things as he works side by side with his daddy."

Now retired, Alvin spends many happy hours talking with friends and neighbors sharing his faith. He enjoys his grandchildren and is the editor and publisher of a family newsletter, The Chace Meanderings, that he distributes to each family member's home monthly.

The Chases' say they are grateful for the opportunity their children and grandchildren have to live on the farm where the century old homeplace is the perfect setting for reflecting on their pioneer heritage. Yet at the same time they can keep up with today's current pace. Interstate 10 runs parallel to their home, so it's just a hop and a skip to modern society.

According to the Chases', "It's a blessing for us, and we couldn't be more pleased or happier that our dream came true right here in Baker County."

#### UPDATE '93:

Alzada Chace lives with daughter Deborah and son-in-law Billy on the same property as the old homestead, and has sold the lovely dream home where they spent many happy family hours. Alvin Chace died December 23, 1991 at the Glen St. Mary home of his daughter Juana and son-in-law Ron Vonk after being lovingly care for by his family during his illness. He is buried in Ebenezer Cemetery in Columbia County, Florida. Prior to his death, on September 23, 1990, friends honored the jovial Alvin, who was in failing health, with an open house honoring his lifelong dedication to his church, family, friends and neighbors. More than 650 persons



attended to pay homage to this godly man whose life was characterized by an extraordinary zeal for the Savior and enthusiasm for teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to all who would hear.

Preceding him in death was his son James( 1990), and daughter Gina Chace Rhoden (1991). Surviving children are Deborah Kerce, Juana Vonk and son David. All reside in Baker County.

His musical talented daughter, Deborah Kerce wrote and recorded an official homecoming song for Baker County in 1990 titled, "Home To Me" which she dedicated to her parents.



# HAROLD AND FAY MILTON

OF 'MILTONDALE' 1980 update 1993

*"I came to Macclenny to apply for a teaching position and married the School Superintendent."* **Fay Mathews Milton**

*"The house your children grow up in is the home your children always remember."* **Harold Milton**

Probably more than any other two people in Baker County, Harold and Fay Milton have influenced our society. Their steadfast generosity in sharing their God given talents and wisdom has been an example for all humanity and touched the lives of countless people. Their gift to others is a legacy and heritage that will be felt eternally.

Side by side and hand in hand this couple has helped to mold and build a community through serving their fellowman and painstakingly develop the lives of countless youngsters.

They reside in their modest home called Miltondale, surrounded by God's loveliest gifts of nature on the outside and a spirit of His peace and harmony on the inside. Placed in inconspicuous places throughout their abode are plaques and framed certificates of recognition and appreciation for their untiring, unselfish and devoted service to their country, state and community. How fortunate we are they came our way!



**Fay & Harold Milton before their marriage in 1934**

Harold Milton began teaching school when pay was low and the hours were long. One had to love children and teaching to overcome the obstacles. Cars were almost unheard of. Most teachers walked to school on dusty unpaved country roads, despite the rain or cold. They had to bring in wood to use in wood-burning heaters to keep their classrooms warm, and in the summer, they tolerated the heat, fought mosquitos and other insects that would come in through windows and doors of the non-insulated, clap-board makeshift rural school houses.

Harold began his teaching career in Olustee, situated in the western part of Baker County. He was a bright and dedicated 17-year-old with a ninth grade degree. He joined a staff of two and the three educators used the old Rose primers and Wheeler's Readers to teach the 60 plus students grades 1-8. School ran for seven months of the year to accommodate the farmer's planting and harvesting season because most students were needed on their parent's farm to help work. Many children arrived at school, rain or shine, in the back of an old horse drawn wagon sitting on the side benches and floor boards. Others walked, toting their meager lunch of grits, sweet potatoes, bacon and biscuits in small tin pails.

Harold boarded during the week in Olustee. On Fridays he traveled by train and went home to his parents for the weekend. They lived north of Macclenny on the land where he was born in 1905.

Within a year, Harold was made principal of the Olustee school. He stayed on the job for three years before moving to a small schoolhouse in nearby Possum Trot. Progress was being made in Baker County and Harold could now ride the bus home on weekends on newly paved Highway 90. During the time school was not in session, Harold studied to obtain a graduate degree. When he obtained it, he moved to Yellow Water and White House before returning to Macclenny. In 1929, at the age of 24, he was elected superintendent of schools for Baker County.

Two years later along came a pretty, refined young lady from Hawthorne seeking employment as a first grade teacher. Her name was Fay Matthews.



"I came to Macclenny to apply for a teaching position and married the school superintendent," laughed Fay as she told about the event that happened in 1931. "Harold was the youngest school superintendent ever elected in the state of Florida, and was the first person I ever voted for. I was twenty-one."

Harold Milton, a native of Baker County, courted his first-grade teacher who taught at Glen St. Mary Elementary School and won her hand three years later.

Fay was taking room and board with the Baptist minister and his wife and settling into the daily routine of life in Baker County. She happily peddled her bicycle to work each morning and greeted her students with a cheerful smile and song. The minister's wife was impressed with her boarder and decided to play cupid. She asked Harold if he wouldn't like to meet Fay formally. But Fay said she wasn't impressed with her suitor at first.

"He phoned me to say he needed to see me because there was something wrong with my register. I was so frightened. Then he came over, and you know what, he didn't even ask me about my register."

The gathering place and most popular eating place in Macclenny at the time was "The Spot." It was located on Main Street Macclenny next door to where the present City Hall stands. The little white building with its cozy calico curtains was the perfect "spot" for Mr. Harold to take his date. Inside the homey atmosphere the two found conversation easy and thus began a friendship that developed into a three year courtship and love.

Harold Milton knew almost immediately he wanted to spend the rest of his life with this charming gentle woman, but he had to respect a duty he felt necessary and that was the care he was rendering his mother and seven siblings. He patiently waited until he felt his mother was not burdened in anyway with his leaving and then he turned to marriage, and Miss Fay.

The couple's 1934 wedding took place in Fay's hometown. Fay was Presbyterian and Harold belonged to the Church of Christ, but they were married by a Baptist preacher in a Methodist Church in Hawthorne. This unique couple has transcended boundaries that would perplex most of us.

"It was a big change in my life," mused Fay. "Life and lifestyles were different in Hawthorne where I grew up near Gainesville. The people there had better opportunities for education and fine arts. Macclenny had no paved streets, cows roamed all over town, there was very little opportunity for higher education and no ballet or piano. Many people were void of electricity and phones. I learned quickly to love the people. Baker County has been so good to us."

The young couple lived in a downtown Macclenny apartment and attended the Baptist church where she played the piano. Their first child, Billy, was born in 1936.

In 1941, Mr. Milton took his beautiful refined bride to look at some land he had found for sale north of Macclenny. The beautiful wooded area was once a large plantation where Union troops camped before marching westward to participate in the Battle of Olustee.

When Fay saw it, she thought the world had come to an end.

"It was out in the middle of nowhere, near the farm where Harold was born. The only way into the land was an old pig trail. And the price tag was high. The 120 acre plot was selling for \$6 an acre.

"I thought we'd never get it paid for," she said. "But Harold had loved this land long before he owned it. As a young boy he roamed the woods and went fishing in the creek. It was so wooded then that he would have to climb a cypress tree to get his bearings so he could go home," she mused. The property is rich in history and has yielded a mass collection of Civil War relics and Indian artifacts such as pieces of flint, arrowheads, Confederate buttons with brass hooks, Indian pottery, bullets, a moustache comb and a tintype. And now....well, oh how she loves it too!

The Miltons had a pig named Porky. They put Porky on the land to get used to it, and Porky would greet them as they came out to clear land and prepared to build. They added a horse named Madam, which from time to time they would ride into town. Eventually they added two more horses and on the days it

rained Harold and his two oldest children would ride them to school because the roads were so muddy.

The couple drew the house plans, and in 1943 constructed their home with timber from their land, even building their first furniture.

"My father had been a carpenter, so I learned the trade," said Harold, as he pointed proudly to their dining room. "That's our original table and china hutch." Throughout the home, most of the furniture represents his handicraft or pieces that once belonged to their parents.

"We still use the same bedroom furniture Harold made when we married," said Fay. The baby crib is now used for grandchildren. The bright and cheerful music room windows frame the outdoor splendor as Fay's piano, the one her mother gave her for her 11th birthday, commands the largest space.

"Our home had no indoor plumbing, electricity, or running water for the first 10 years," said Harold, pointing to some beautiful Aladdin lamps now converted to electricity. "As the children were born we'd knock out a wall and build an additional room."

During the 1950s the house was modernized.

The children, Flo Ann, a former Gator Bowl Queen; Billy, an educator at Raines High School who has won the most spirited teacher award and most valuable teacher three times; and Alice Fay, who recently built Better Homes and Garden's House of the Year on a 25 acre site next door to them, grew up in Milondale. They loved swimming in the cool clear creek that flows at the foot of the slopping glade. The outdoor privy was always shown off with pride each time the family had visitors. Their mother often washed the family's clothes, pioneer style, in the creek on a big rock and then hang them to dry in front of the two fireplaces. And when each of them went off to college their educations were financed by harvesting the pine trees they had planted in their youth. In the beginning though, everyone didn't share the Milton's adventure. One such person was their maid.

"When we first moved here, our maid said she wouldn't stay out here with us home, much less not at home, so I quit

teaching school and started teaching piano," said Fay. "Many of my piano students are married with families of their own, and I now teach their children."

For 23 years Fay Milton taught the first grade. Her students fondly penned the name "Miss Fay" to her and it still sticks today.

She retired in 1956 and devoted her talent and skill to teaching more than 500 Baker County piano students. And over the years many gifts of love and appreciation accumulated from her students and their parents. As those students marry or have a house warming, she wraps the gifts up with tender loving care and returns them to her former students as tokens of her love and appreciation. The present Macclenny band director, Denny Wells, was one surprised recipient when, at his housewarming, he received a beautiful cake dish with matching smaller dishes, given to his favorite music teacher many years ago.

"I can just see Denny now, coming up the walk with a box almost as big as he was.

"People don't know what fun is," said Miss Fay. "Harold and I spent our time doing what we loved best, serving the community and enjoying our family. That was our recreation.

"When Harold was school principal, he organized the first high school band in Baker County. I was PTA President so we raised money for their uniforms."

Both have helped organize most of Macclenny's clubs and organizations, serving as president more than once, whenever they were needed. In 1971 and 1986, Miss Fay was honored as Woman of the Year by the Macclenny Woman's Club, and Retired Teacher of the Year in 1985.

In 1965, Harold retired from the Baker County School system after holding almost every position. He organized the county's first football team and first high school band. He was the first president of the Lions Club, which spearheaded the drive to get band uniforms. He served as a trustee at Lake City Community College, where the vocational building was named in his honor.

Harold and Fay are dedicated members of the Church of Christ in Macclenny, and find great joy serving there and anywhere else they are still called to do a job.



In their cozy homespun kitchen is an old-fashioned fireplace, "the kind our Grandmas used to cook in," explained Fay. "Harold always had the fire ready to start on winter mornings. When the grandchildren are here, they love to roast wieners and marshmallows over the fire." (The house has a fireplace in the living area also.)

Fay organized the Friendly Fellowship Club for senior citizens, (this was the forerunner for the present day Council on Aging and this effort won state wide recognition from the National Federation of Women Clubs). She organized the Junior Woman's Club, and the first county choir. She helps with all community projects when called upon, and Milondale has been used for group Easter Egg hunts, boy and girl scouts, school functions, camp outs, club and church socials.

Elected president of the Womans Club twice, she was asked to help supply books for the county library as a project. Quickly she formed a unique idea for a celebrity book shelf. She mailed letters to as many famous named people requesting they donate an autographed book to the county library. The first letter went to her brother, former Congressman D.R. (Billy) Matthews who sent a book on America's historic homes.

"The response was overwhelming," she said, opening a book compiled of letters from celebrities who responded and sent books such as Governor Reubin Askew, former Georgia Governor Lester Mattox, former governors Claude Kirk and Leroy Collins, (eight governors in all) and Representative Charles Bennett, Spessard Holland, and State Cabinet members. Needless to say, the 52-book collection is a treasured addition to the library.

Miss Fay noticed that several retired teachers were residents of the local nursing home so she suggested to some of her Womans Club friends that perhaps they could form a singing group and go entertain all residents in the nursing home. "Down Memory Lane" was born, and today has evolved into "The Charmers" a group of women aged 50-85 who perform everything from the Charleston to "Moonlight and Roses." They still entertain at the two local nursing homes, and in addition appear professionally making

money for their club. In 1992 the group won first place in the statewide FFWC talent and music division.

Both Fay and Harold are active in the Retired Teachers Association and are recognized for their creativeness in state and national projects. Through the efforts of Fay, a Retired Teacher's Day was proclaimed by Florida's governor in 1981 after a four year lobbying effort. She convinced the governor that "there would be no doctors, lawyers, administrators or even governors had it not been for teachers." She wrote the official song that has been adopted for the group. The special day is observed annually on the third Sunday in November. In Baker County, both Harold and Fay serve on Historical preservations projects and the Community Improvements Association (receiving national recognition).

Towering millennial oaks spread their majestic branches graciously down the terraced pastoral terrain toward Dick White Creek that borders Milondale. (Dick White Creek was so named for a former slave who lived there until his death). Beneath the shaded woodland sky amid an abundance of wildflowers, Fay and Harold hold their annual Milton and Matthews family reunions, and have seen their two beautiful daughters marry beneath the outdoor splendor.

Today the retired couple enjoys the fruits of their labors....children, grandchildren and friends who stop by to reminisce. Ofttimes with Fay at the piano, she and Harold sing many of their old favorite songs that remind them of days gone by. The simple lovely strains filter through the quiet and peaceful setting and drift away with the breeze. Sometimes Harold builds a cozy fire in their comfortable living room and sits near-by in his favorite easy chair listening to the soothing crackle while reading his Bible.

"The house that your children grow up in is the house you always remember," said Harold.

"And it takes a heap of living to make a house a home," commented Fay.

If you are ever so fortunate to visit Milondale, you will find that a special traditional spirit prevails and awaits the arrival of family and friends. The table will be adorned with great Grandma's

ancestral heirloom china, a miniature punch bowl, used by Fay as a child, will serve the younger children and traditional butter cookies and lime sherbet will be served after a luscious dinner. The fire will crackle, and cast a peaceful glow. Sweet music will fill the air as Fay's talented fingers play with precision renditions of your favorite golden oldies. Voices will sing in unison, hearts will beat in rapture, and you can be sure you will forever remember your memorable visit with the Miltons at Miltondale.

Footnote:

Billy is a bachelor who lives at Miltondale now that his parents have retired and grown less active. He is chairman of the social studies department at Raines High School.

Flo Ann is married to Lex Holloway and lives in Palatka where she teaches school.

Alice Fay is married to Richard Sinclair and lives next to her parents in Miltondale. She is an assistant principal at West Side Elementary School in Glen St. Mary.

On February 6, 1993 the couple was paid homage by the citizens of Baker County, and others who came from far and wide, with a reception titled "Down Memory Lane", honoring them for their many years of devoted services to others. Miss Fay was invited to play as few of the couple's favorite tunes for her friends who had gathered. As her hands gracefully strolled up and down the piano keys, her 87 year old wheel-bound husband, now in failing health sang along, joining her in support as he has done throughout their life. The lovelight that glowed brightly in their eyes more than six decades ago still radiates in their eyes. Only their steps have been slowed a little, but the desire to be a positive force in the lives of family, friends and community is still a constant desire for them. No, the likes of this couple will never, absolutely never, come our way again. Mere words, no matter how eloquently written, can never capture a clear, vivid description of this phenomenal couple no matter how many words are penned, or by whom.



Compliments of Baker County Standard

**Harold And Fay Milton  
Down Memory Lane Reception  
in their honor  
February 6, 1993**



## CLAUDE SCOLES:

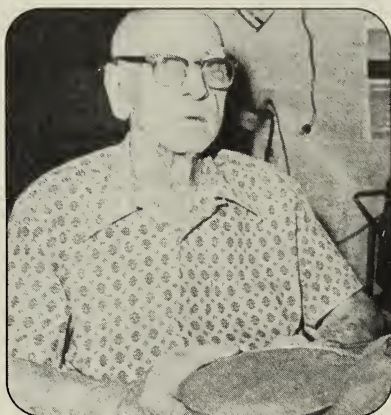
Glen St. Mary 1979

*"It's been over 60 years since those days in France and my memories are growing dim."*

**Claude Scoles**

Memories of France and World War 1.

Shortly before noon on Sunday, June 28th, 1914, crowds gathered in Sarajevo, the capital of the Austrian province of Bosnia. They came to see Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, and his wife Sophie. Suddenly a man jumped on the running board of the royal touring car and fired a pistol. Two shots struck



**Claude Scoles**

Ferinand and one hit Sophie, who was trying to shield him. They both died almost immediately. The assassin was Gavrilo Princip, a young Bosnian student who had lived in Serbia.

Austria-Hungary suspected that its small neighbor, Serbia, had approved the plot to kill Ferdinand. As a result, it declared war on Serbia on July 28, 1914. By October 30, the Central Powers—Austria-Hungary, Germany and the Ottoman Empire—were at war with the Allies, Belgium, France, Great Britain, Russia and Serbia. Other countries later joined in the fighting.

A single act...the shooting of Ferdinand, marked the outbreak of World War I, but there were several basic causes.

The United States tried to remain neutral in the early years of World War I. The British angered Americans by searching neu-

tral ships. But Britain, as a nation at war, had the right to search under international law. Americans turned against the Central Powers when they learned of German submarines sinking unarmed passenger ships, and German atrocities against civilians. The entry of the United States into the war boosted Allied morale, and fresh American troops reinforced the battered Allied armies. Americans had decided that by joining the Allies they would help "make the world safe for democracy." American doughboys, as the soldiers were called, marched aboard troopships singing George M. Cohan's "Over There."

One such red blooded American doughboy was 19 year old Claude Scoles, who enlisted along with many of the friends he was born and raised with in Mt. Vernon, Ohio and who marched aboard one of the thirteen convoy troop ships with 50,000 other American doughboys heading for France in 1917.

"It was real rough, everyone was sick," remembered Claude from his retirement home in Glen St. Mary. "I'd never been so far from shore that I couldn't throw a stone and hit it. We came down between England and Scotland expecting trouble in the channel because that's where the German submarines congregated. If a piece of paper fell someone would shoot at it we were so scared."

Much of the war involved hand to hand combat in trenches between the largest armies ever seen up to that time. New and improved weapons gave each side more efficient machines to kill the enemy.

Claude Scoles, trained for combat in America received new training in France to use the French weapons, and usually traveled in boxcars by train to and from locations.

"French girls, hired as brakemen, had to keep their doors locked on the trains at all times," he said, "guarding against love starved soldiers.

"We slept in trenches to keep from being shot. You couldn't dig an inch without hitting water, so that meant we stayed wet and muddy all the time. It rained constantly.

"We wore hob nailed shoes, and wore wool clothes with wrap leggings (like an ace bandage only it's wool). Their argument

was we wouldn't catch colds if we wore wool summer and winter, and all the time," he said shaking his head at their unfounded reasoning.

"I got a bunch of coodyds (body lice) once and I looked like a zebra all spotted over with iodine they put on me to kill 'em, but I didn't get rid of them until we got to where we could change our clothes.

"There was a terrible flu epidemic in France and people were dying everywhere. I came down with something, never did know what, and lost 45 pounds. I refused to go to the hospital so many were dying. I just took CC pills, all it was... was a laxative, and I finally got over it. Everyone thought I was doomed to die.

"We got to go on R & R (rest and recreation) occasionally," he said. "France was the most filthy country in the world, you couldn't bathe for flies. Worse place I ever seen. Toilet facilities were very primitive. The French used chamber pots and usually dumped it out their windows. If you were walkin' along the streets you'd best walk out in the middle of the street or up close to the building or it would hit you for sure. Flies were everywhere. Gads! It was terrible!," he shivered remembering the situation. "Everyone got French dysentery from poor water."

Even so the Americans found time for jokes and fun on their \$30. a month salary plus \$3. extra for overseas duty.

"Once I went into a French Tavern and this beautiful French girl kept smiling at me and at the same time uttering some of the most foul words imaginable, smiling all the time. Americans sitting at a nearby table laughing hysterically revealed that had 'taught her some friendly American greeting words," he said. "That poor French girl thought she was saying nice words to me."

His outfit, E Battery, 134th Field Auxiliary, 37th Division, which is known as Buckeye (being from the state of Ohio) were given a commendation from Edward Burr, Brigadier General of the USA for outstanding conduct. His outfit was one of the first combats to be shipped home, landing on American soil in New Port News, Va.

The peaceful little Ohio town he left wasn't quite the same. Perhaps because he lost some of his friends serving with him on French soil, perhaps because his parents had migrated to Florida, but regardless, a few years later found Claude Scoles leaving Mt. Vernon, Ohio once more, only this time for Baker County, Florida.

"My dad, Clement Laird Vanlandingham Scoles, had bought a house here from Mr. Getsy, also a native from Ohio. I stopped by to visit, on my way to Miami, and stayed. I've never regretted it," he said with a broad smile.

"In 1928, he met and married a native Baker Countian, Lillian Mae Prevatt, daughter of William Kell Prevatt and Mary Lou Combs.

"Both of us were old enough to know better," he quipped, explaining he was 30 and she was 26.

"I had a brand new car and a good job at the Glen St. Mary nursery," chimed in his wife, explaining she was head propagator of the green houses.

"Yea, but you were waitin' on ole number one," he said with a twinkle in his eye.

"I got her job at the nursery too," he said. "People asked me what happened to her and I told 'em I fired her," he laughed, but admitted he wanted her home raising their family which incidentally are their three children they're so proud of, Robert, JoAnn and Wendell. Their oldest child, Joyce Jean, born on March 4, 1928, died at the age of five years.

Slowly and carefully he picked up a letter addressed to Cpl. Claude Scoles and said, "This letter's from an 84 year old friend of mine in Ohio who served with me in our outfit. He writes that at our last reunion only twenty eight were known to be left from the original 208 in our outfit.

"It's been over 60 years since those days in France and my memories are growing dim," he said as he wistfully folded a hand-made cigarette, leaned back in the comfort of his easy chair, and cast his eyes on an array of memorabilia he'd kept as souvenirs. But it was certain, this man would never forget, "Over There".

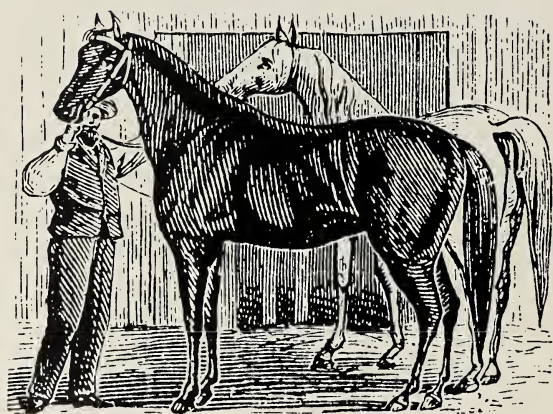
UPDATE '93:

Claude Scoles died October 24, 1980 and is buried in Taylor Cem-



etery at Taylor, Florida.

His wife Lillian Mae, now 92, lives along in their little home place in Glen St. Mary. Her story appears in another volume.



## **SPECIAL RECOGNITION: Joe Dobson**

On March 19, 1987 The Baker County Sertoma Club presented its Service to Mankind Award to Joseph Dobson and I was asked by the family to write a characterization for the event.

It was the easiest portrait I've ever painted in narrative form because of the high esteem I've felt for this kind and gentle man all my life. In his honor, I include it in this publication for the likes of this individual will not pass our way again.



**Homie & Joe Dobson**

It is not what he has, nor even what he does, which directly expresses the worth of a man, but what he is....and this award tonight, to Joe Dobson is not because of what he has done, nor for his material worth, but for what he is. He is a man who exhibits the love of Christ in his heart and life, who thinks the best, not the worst, of others, who refrains from trying to impress others with his own importance, who does not envy the fortunes of others and who, through the truth he daily lives, determines his character.

This extraordinary man's life began before daylight on a cold winter morning, January 26, 1914, inside the large rambling home of his parents, George and Daisy (Fraser) Dobson, in Sanderson, Fla. He was the sixth of nine children born to this devoted couple.

From an early age he learned from his parents to develop sincerity and truth, honest dealings and clean thinking, and he was

endowed with the courage that is born of loyalty to all that is noble and worthy.

As a very young boy, Joe began his enterprising career by selling five cent scoops of ice cream every Saturday in Sanderson. The sweet treat was delivered once a week by train from Jacksonville packed in dry ice and left on the train depot platform.

After graduation from Sanderson High School, he obtained a teaching certificate and taught in various schools in Baker County. For a short time, he ran a gas station in Sanderson, and later gave that business to his parents when he became employed with the Seaboard Railroad, riding trains as a Brakeman from Jacksonville to Chattahoochee.

In 1941, he became interested in Baker County politics and entered the race for the office of Clerk of Circuit Court, only to lose that race by one vote. He refused a voting recount, but returned in 1944 to defeat his same opponent. He successfully held the office for eight terms, having opposition only four of those. In all, he served a total of 32 years of faithful, devoted and honorable service to the people of Baker County as their Clerk of Court. Many of our county's historical documents were handwritten by Joe Dobson.

Throughout this man's exceptional life he has lifted many burdens for people through his quiet deeds and service to mankind.

His daily visits to our county hospital and nursing home and the homes of ill and needy friends and relatives have not gone unnoticed. Those people whose hearts were lifted by his assistance and support in turn chose him to serve in the honorary position of pallbearer for their loved ones perhaps more than any other one man in the county's history.

Joe Dobson's infectious smile and genuine wave of his hand has endeared him to the young and old not only throughout Baker County but other places as well. He will strike up a conversation with anyone anywhere, asking who they are, where they are going and most of the time, why. Through his genuine love of people he has always expressed a candid interest in others, exhibiting his deep conviction that all mankind is a family.



His life was greatly enhanced by his marriage on August 7, 1946 to his present companion, Homie Blitch Dobson, (a native of Olustee), who shares the same character and attributes as those of her husband. They have three children, Patricia Bumgarner of Valdosta, Georgia; (daughter of Ursel Parks and Homie Blitch) JoAnn Griffis and Joey Dobson of Macclenny.

His annual vegetable garden is much larger than the couple find necessary for their needs because they find so much joy in sharing their bounty with others.

Joe Dobson's success is not measured in achievement, though he has achieved success in life....but by his character, the quality by which a man is measured before the throne of God...for this man's demonstrations of humble actions and God-like attributes, have exhibited well the love of Christ in his heart, and charity as well for the countless lives he has touched.

#### UPDATE:

Joe Dobson's beloved companion died November 16, 1989. She was born in Olustee Florida November 17, 1910, to Homer Blitch and Anna Dorman. Just prior to Homie's death Joe suffered from Alzheimer's Disease. He died on February 14, 1993. Both are buried in Manntown Cemetery south of Glen St. Mary.

JoAnn married James Alan Griffis on August 10, 1968. Their son Corey Joseph was born on April 29, 1972, and Casey Cameron June 18, 1974, Daughter Katie Leigh was born March 16, 1984. Their births were in Duval County, Florida. All were reared in Baker County.

Joey married Kathy Lyons: Their daughter Tracy Jo was born on Feb 4, 1972, and twins Shelly Denise and Jonathan Kelly were born Nov 24, 1974. Daughter Ashley Brooke was born July 4, 1981. His second marriage was to Linda Pounds.



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Baker's Dozen

MUSIC

Angels Will Watch O'er You

Who Am I

Tattered Box

